FABLES & HUMOUR

THE FOOL'S DISCIPLES

Laugh your head off at the unbelievably foolish antics of Paramartha and his disciples, but you'll find, surprisingly, that you are always on their side. Their kindly, simple ways have had a fan following since the 17th century, when the tales were concocted by an Italian priest who settled in Madurai. In this Tamil work, the author hits upon a happy combination of sound advice and rollicking humour.

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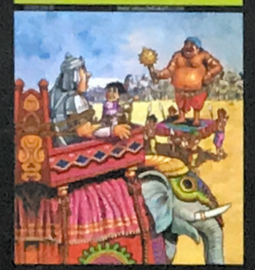
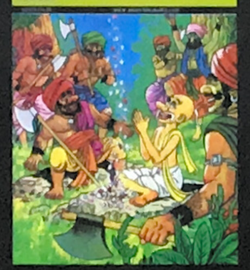


THE MAGIC CHANT



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THE FOOL'S DISCIPLES

TALES OF SENSE AND NONSENSE

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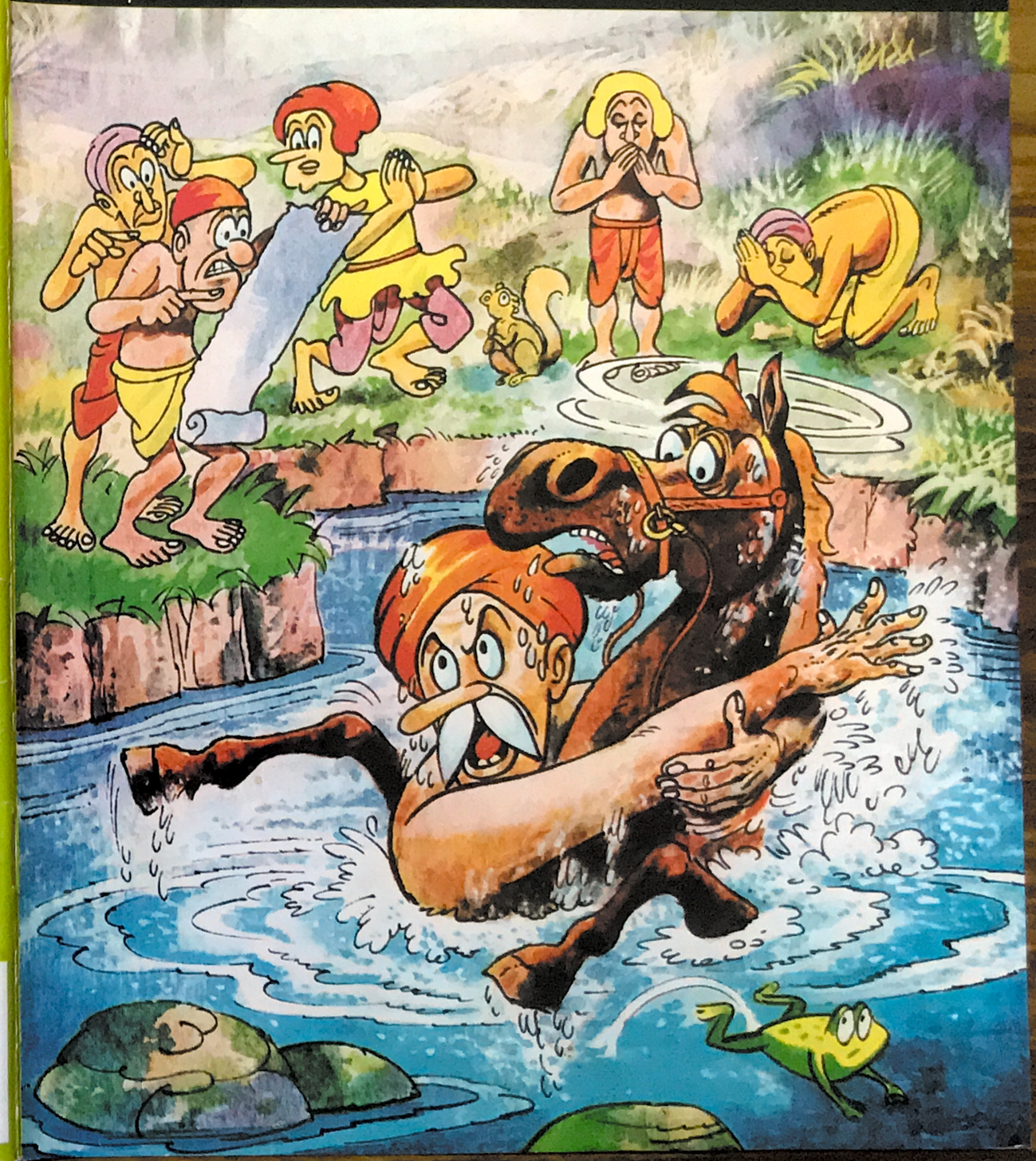


THE FOOL'S DISCIPLES

LONG LONG AGO, IN A VILLAGE IN SOUTH INDIA, THERE LIVED A POOR, AGED SIMPLETON. HE CALLED HIMSELF PARAMARTHA. HE WAS GOOD-NATURED AND HARMLESS.

ONE DAY, AS HE WAS WALKING ALONG THE ROAD—

BLESS US, O MAHATMA.

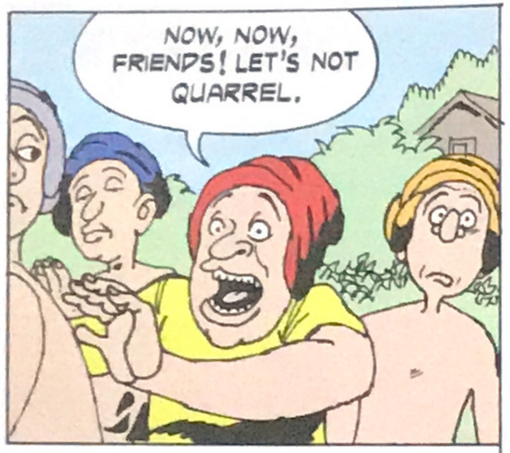
MAY GOD'S GRACE BE WITH YOU.

YOU BLESSED US JUST ONCE THOUGH WE ARE FIVE. MAY I ASK FOR WHOM THE BLESSING WAS ?

FOR ME, OF COURSE!

BUT I TOUCHED HIS FEET FIRST!

I WAS THE ONE. YOUR HAND WAS RIGHT ABOVE MY HEAD.

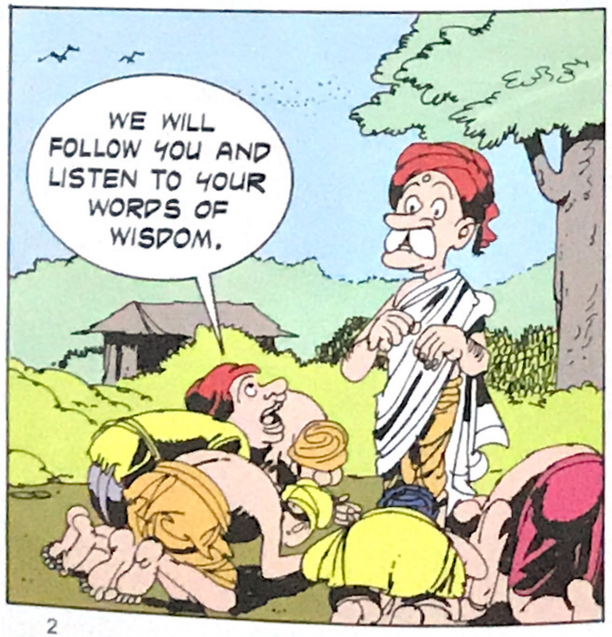

NOW, NOW, FRIENDS! LET'S NOT QUARREL.

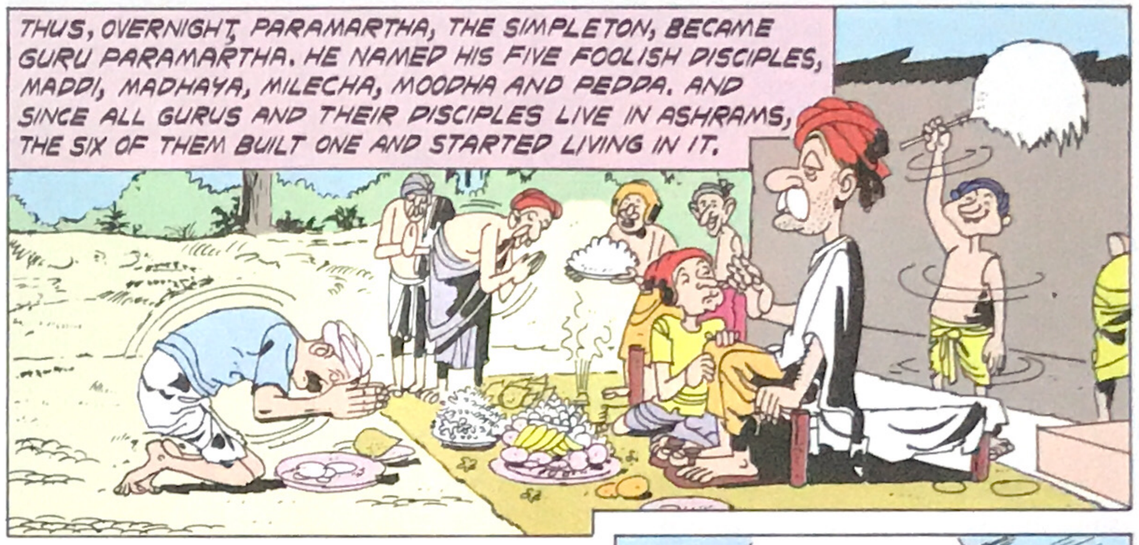
O HOLY ONE, YOU TELL US. WHO DID YOU REALLY BLESS?
I... ER... I BLESSED THE MOST FOOLISH AMONG YOU.

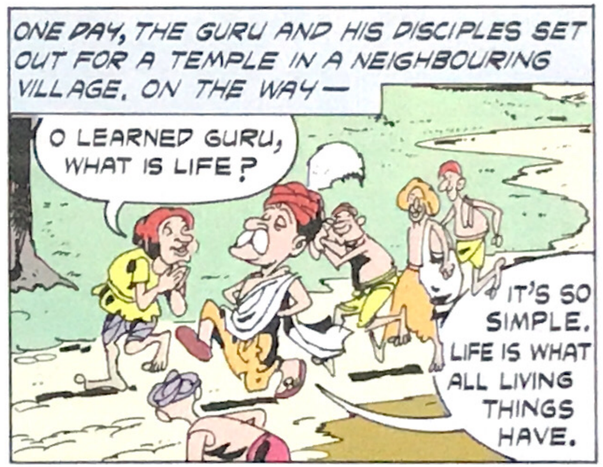
AH, THERE! WHAT DID I TELL YOU? I WAS THE ONE.
WHO SAYS SO? I AM THE GREATER FOOL. HE BLESSED ME!

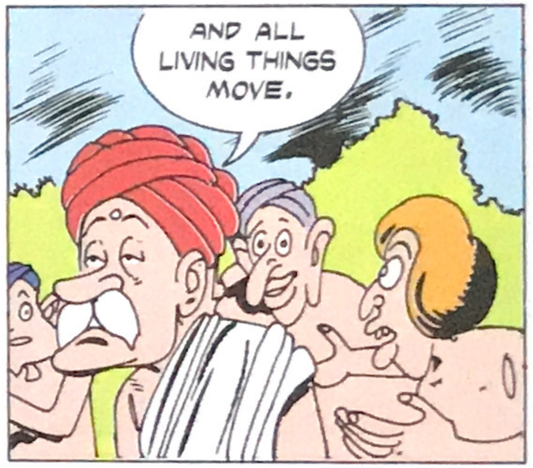
WAIT. ALL MEN ARE FOOLISH. THEREFORE I HAVE BLESSED ALL OF YOU.

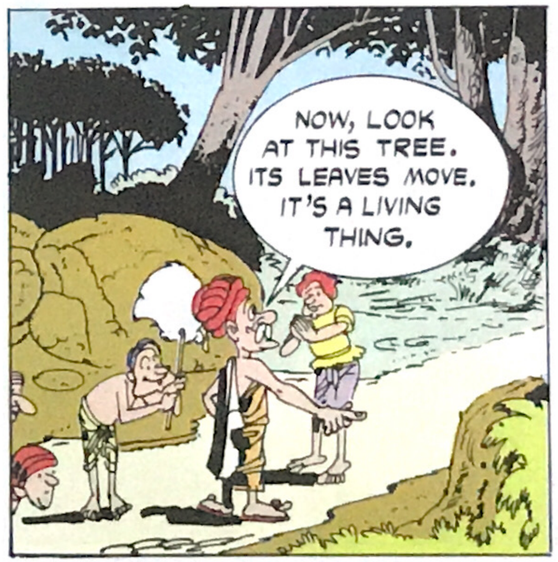
O MAHATMA, NEVER HAVE WE HEARD SUCH WORDS OF WISDOM.
SUCH GREAT WORDS CAN COME ONLY FROM A GREAT MAN.

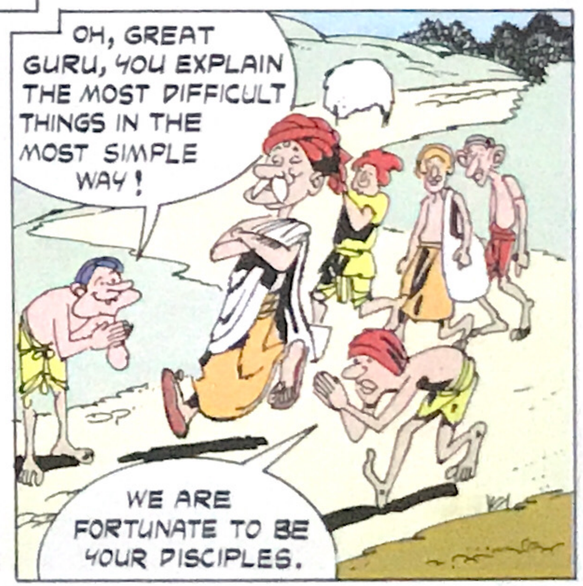

WE WILL FOLLOW YOU AND LISTEN TO YOUR WORDS OF WISDOM.


THUS, OVERNIGHT, PARAMARTHA, THE SIMPLETON, BECAME GURU PARAMARTHA. HE NAMED HIS FIVE FOOLISH DISCIPLES, MADDI, MADHAYA, MILECHA, MOODHA AND PEDDA. AND SINCE ALL GURUS AND THEIR DISCIPLES LIVE IN ASHRAMS, THE SIX OF THEM BUILT ONE AND STARTED LIVING IN IT.


ONE DAY, THE GURU AND HIS DISCIPLES SET OUT FOR A TEMPLE IN A NEIGHBOURING VILLAGE. ON THE WAY—
O LEARNED GURU, WHAT IS LIFE?
IT'S SO SIMPLE. LIFE IS WHAT ALL LIVING THINGS HAVE.


AND ALL LIVING THINGS MOVE.


NOW, LOOK AT THIS TREE. ITS LEAVES MOVE. IT'S A LIVING THING.


OH, GREAT GURU, YOU EXPLAIN THE MOST DIFFICULT THINGS IN THE MOST SIMPLE WAY!
WE ARE FORTUNATE TO BE YOUR DISCIPLES.

LATER IN THE EVENING, THE GURU AND HIS DISCIPLES HAD TO CROSS A RIVER.

IS THIS RIVER A LIVING THING?

OF COURSE, CAN'T YOU SEE IT MOVING?

IT MOVES. EVER SO LITTLE, BUT IT MOVES.

WOULD IT BE ANGRY IF WE CROSSED IT?

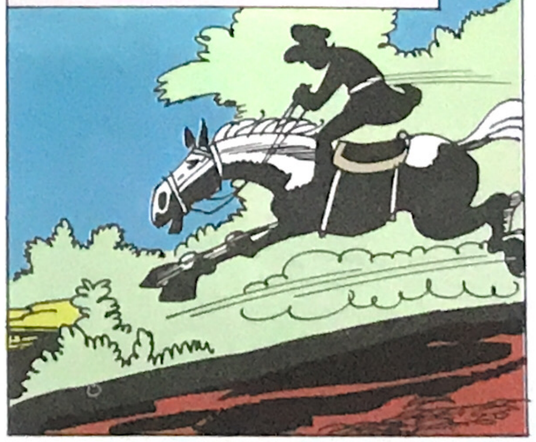
WE MUST CROSS IT ONLY WHEN IT'S ASLEEP.

THEN I'LL GO AND SEE WHETHER IT'S ASLEEP.

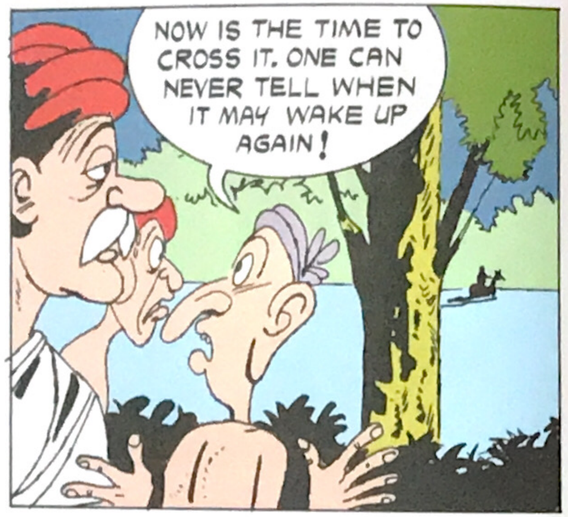
WE'LL WAIT HERE FOR YOU.

I'LL PROD IT WITH MY TORCH.

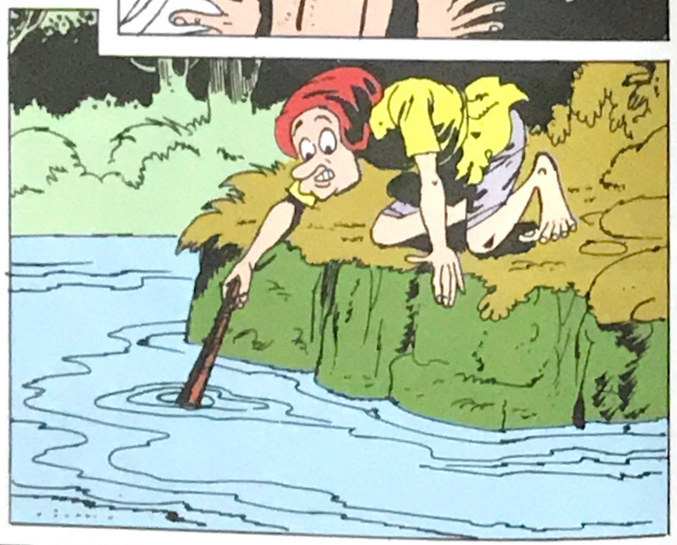
WHILE GURU PARAMARTHA AND HIS DISCIPLES WERE WAITING FOR THE RIVER TO FALL ASLEEP, A MAN RIDING A HORSE CAME ALONG.



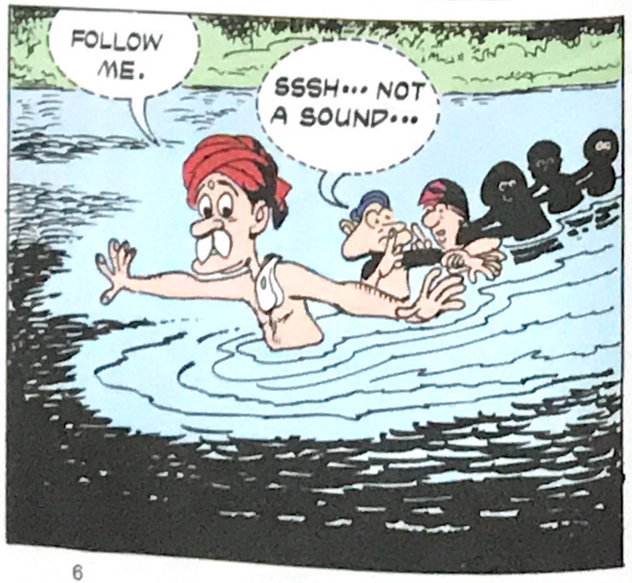
LOOK! THAT MAN IS CROSSING THE RIVER!
THEN THE RIVER MUST HAVE GONE TO SLEEP.

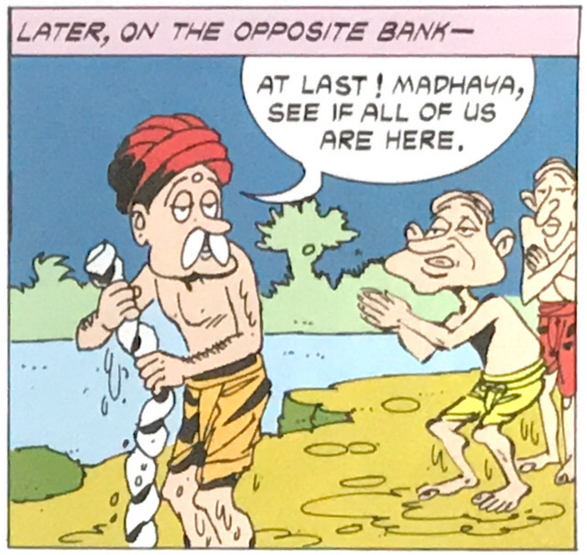

NOW IS THE TIME TO CROSS IT. ONE CAN NEVER TELL WHEN IT MAY WAKE UP AGAIN!

LET'S NOT TAKE ANY CHANCES. I'LL FIND OUT IF IT IS REALLY ASLEEP.



IT'S SAFE! COME ON, LET'S CROSS IT.


FOLLOW ME.
SSSH... NOT A SOUND...


LATER, ON THE OPPOSITE BANK—
AT LAST! MADHAYA, SEE IF ALL OF US ARE HERE.

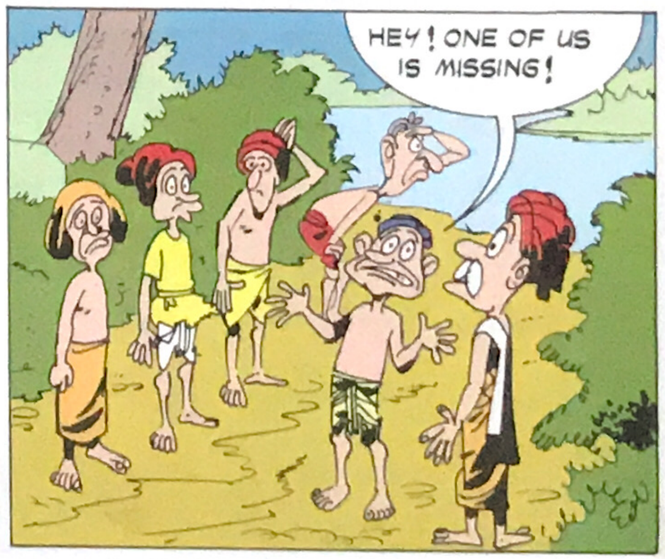
MADHAYA STARTED COUNTING.
ONE, GURU...

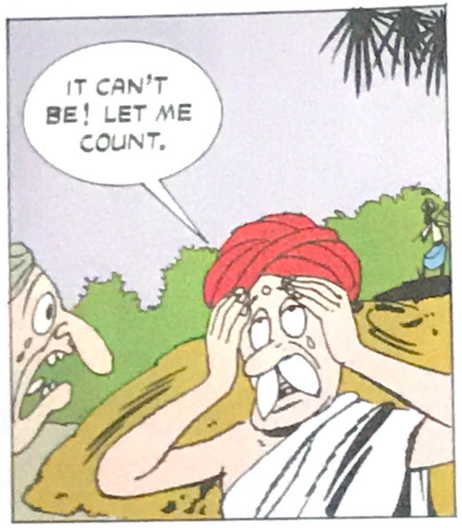
...TWO, MOODHA...

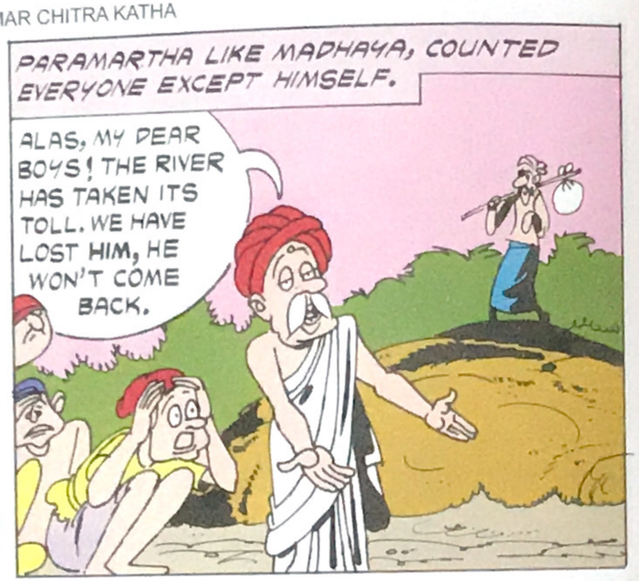
...THREE, PEDDA...

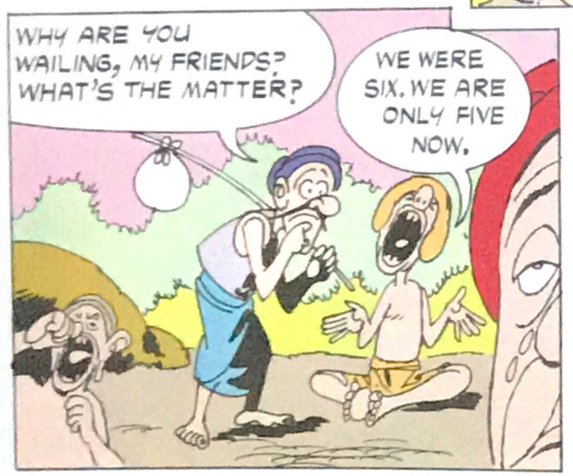
...FOUR, MILECHA...

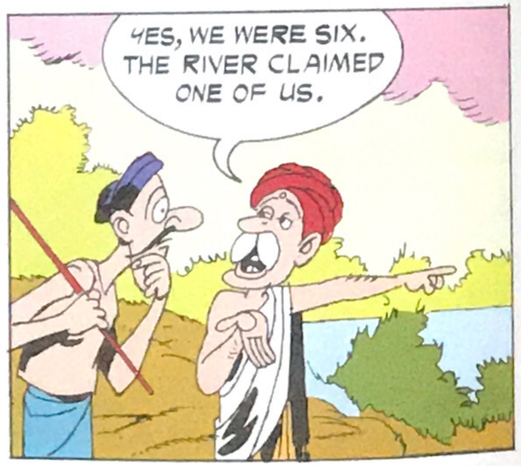
...FIVE, MADDI...


HEY! ONE OF US IS MISSING!

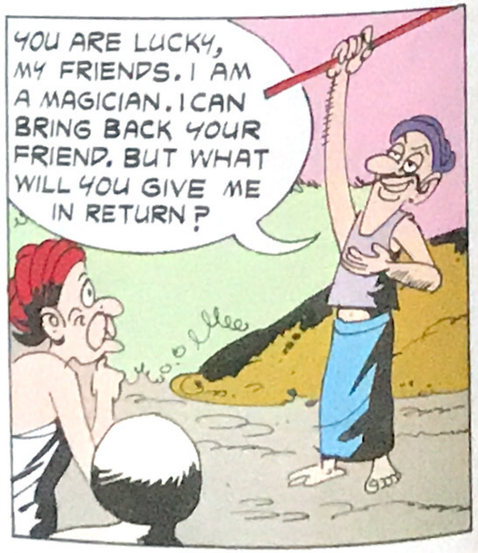

IT CAN'T BE! LET ME COUNT.


PARAMARTHA LIKE MADHAYA, COUNTED EVERYONE EXCEPT HIMSELF.
ALAS, MY DEAR BOYS! THE RIVER HAS TAKEN ITS TOLL. WE HAVE LOST HIM, HE WON'T COME BACK.

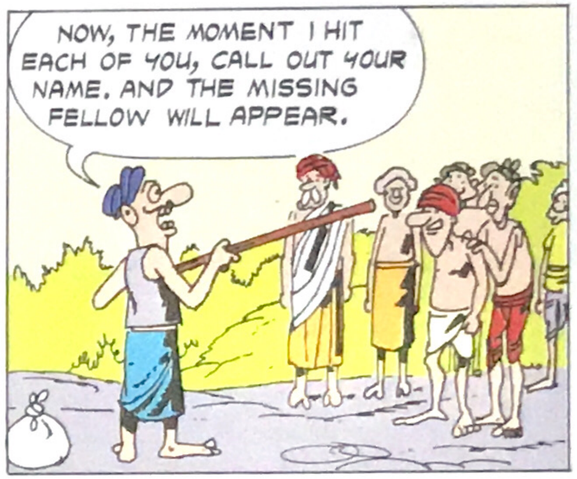

WHY ARE YOU WAILING, MY FRIENDS? WHAT'S THE MATTER?
WE WERE SIX. WE ARE ONLY FIVE NOW.

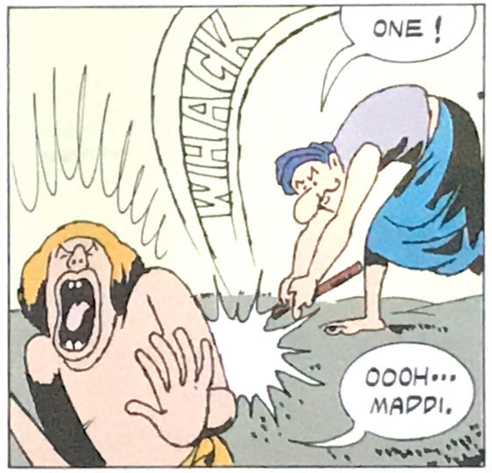

YES, WE WERE SIX. THE RIVER CLAIMED ONE OF US.

FOOLS! BUT WAIT... I CAN PROFIT BY THEIR FOOLISHNESS.


YOU ARE LUCKY, MY FRIENDS. I AM A MAGICIAN. I CAN BRING BACK YOUR FRIEND. BUT WHAT WILL YOU GIVE ME IN RETURN?

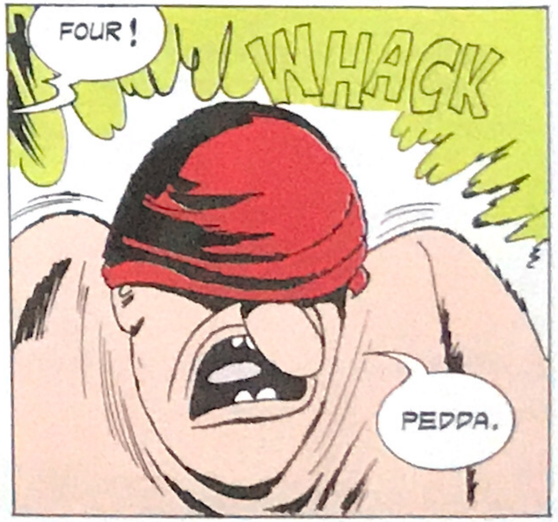
FORTY PIECES OF SILVER.
ALL RIGHT. CLOSE YOUR EYES AND STAND IN A ROW.

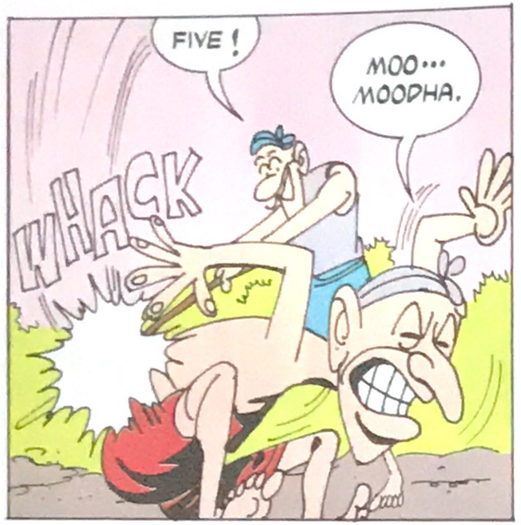

NOW, THE MOMENT I HIT EACH OF YOU, CALL OUT YOUR NAME. AND THE MISSING FELLOW WILL APPEAR.


WHACK
ONE!
OOOH... MADDI.

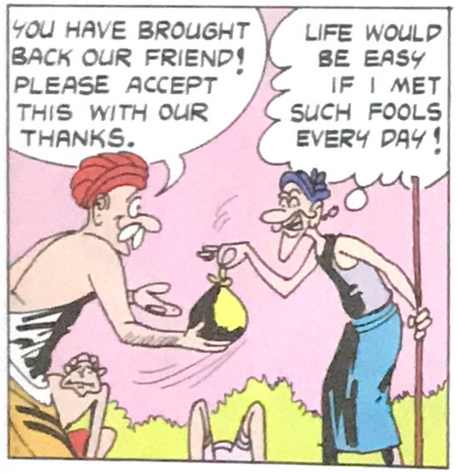
WHACK
TWO!
AAAH... MILECHA.

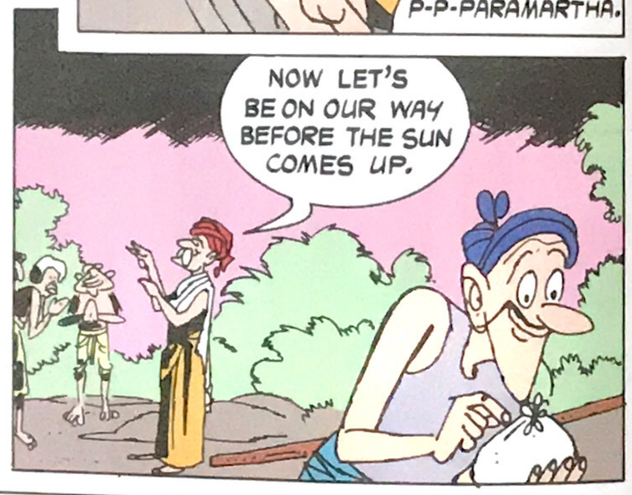
WHACK
THREE!
M-M-MADHAYA.

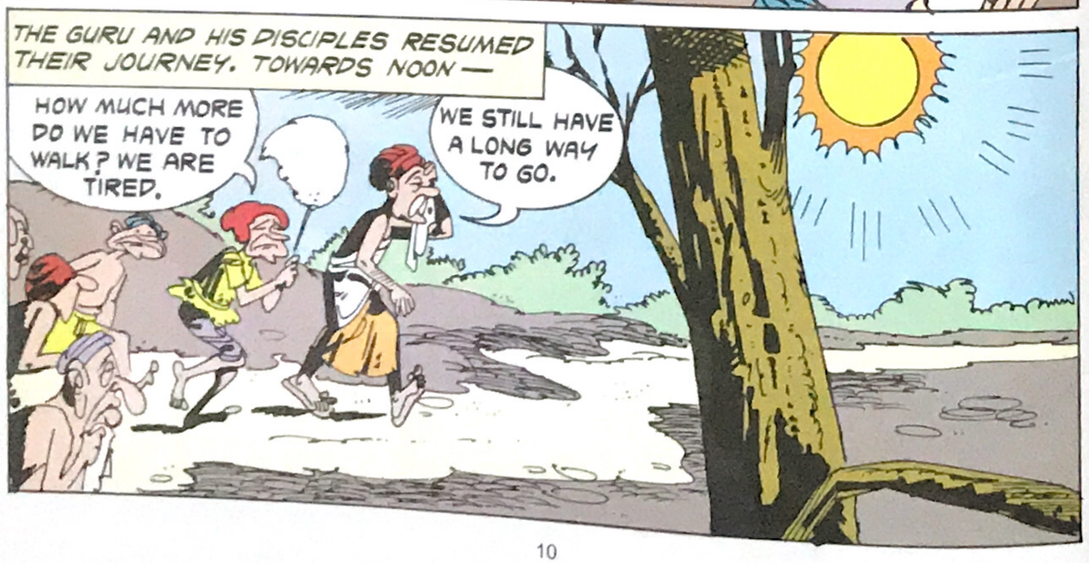

WHACK
FOUR!
PEDDA.

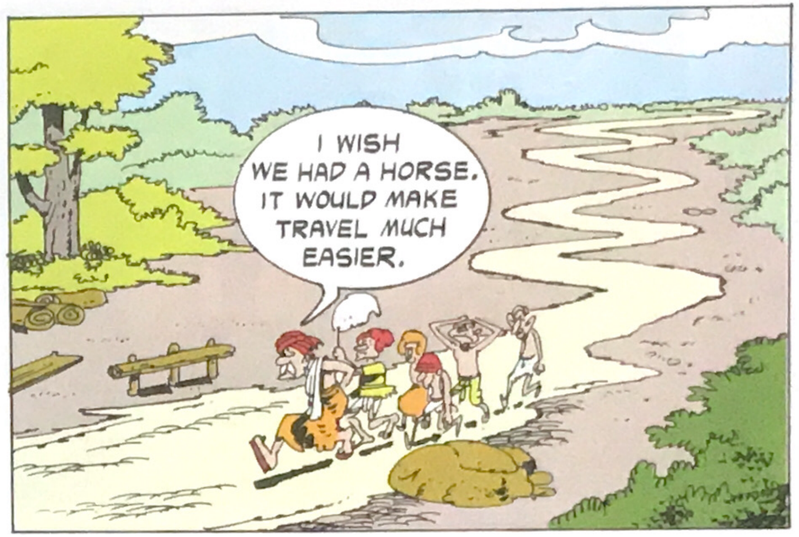

FIVE!
MOO... MOOPHA.
WHACK

SIX!
WHACK
GOD! P-P-PARAMARTHA.

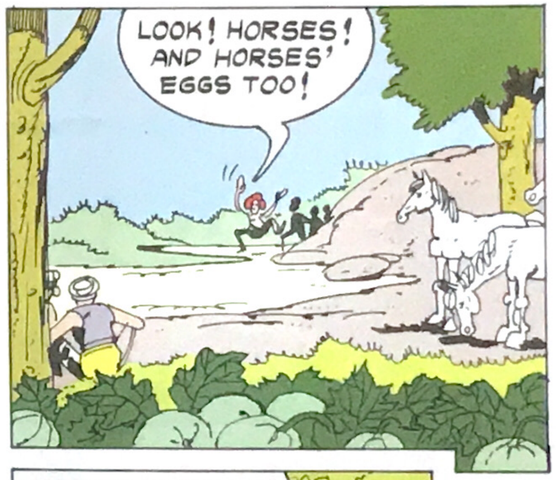

YOU HAVE BROUGHT BACK OUR FRIEND! PLEASE ACCEPT THIS WITH OUR THANKS.
LIFE WOULD BE EASY IF I MET SUCH FOOLS EVERY DAY!


NOW LET'S BE ON OUR WAY BEFORE THE SUN COMES UP.

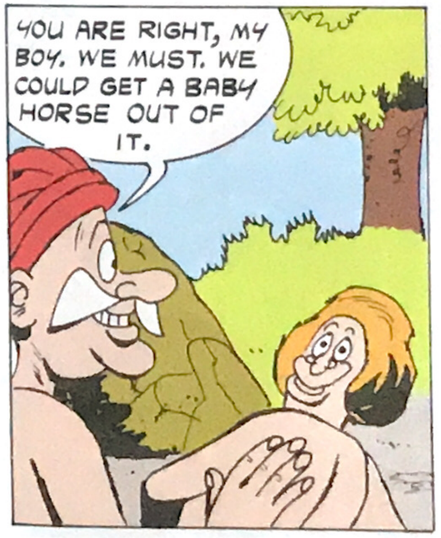

THE GURU AND HIS DISCIPLES RESUMED THEIR JOURNEY. TOWARDS NOON —
HOW MUCH MORE DO WE HAVE TO WALK? WE ARE TIRED.
WE STILL HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO.

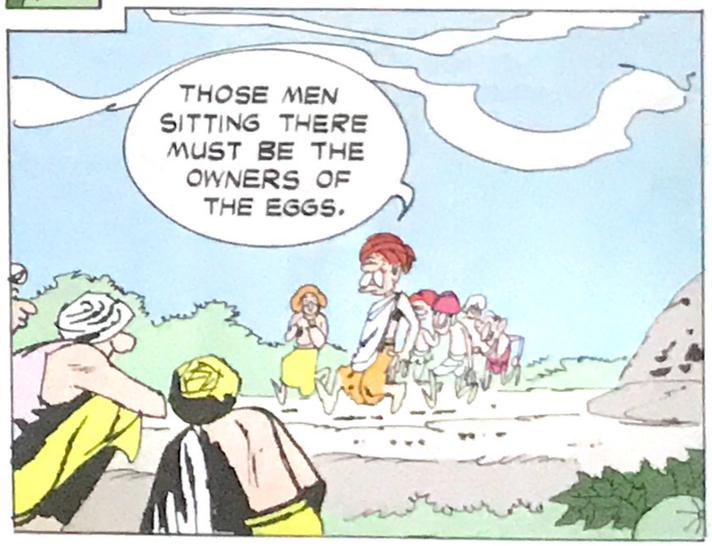

I WISH WE HAD A HORSE. IT WOULD MAKE TRAVEL MUCH EASIER.

I HAVE ALWAYS WANTED TO RIDE A HORSE.


LOOK! HORSES! AND HORSES' EGGS TOO!

WE MUST GO AND BUY ONE.


YOU ARE RIGHT, MY BOY. WE MUST. WE COULD GET A BABY HORSE OUT OF IT.


THOSE MEN SITTING THERE MUST BE THE OWNERS OF THE EGGS.

GO AND ASK THEM THE PRICE.

WE WANT TO BUY ONE OF THOSE HORSES' EGGS.

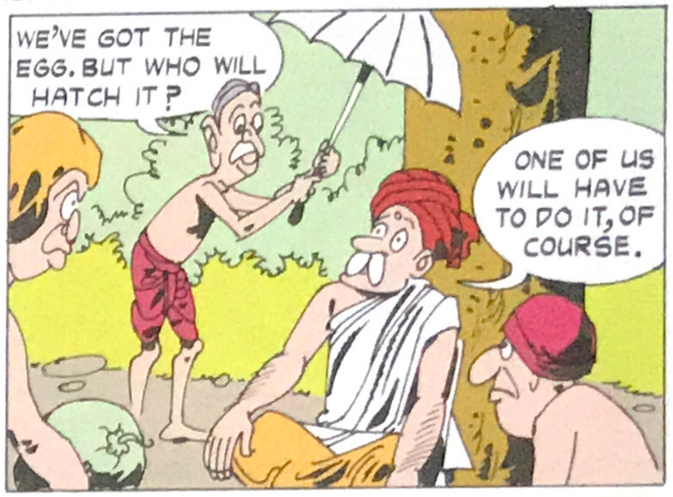
WILL YOU SELL US ONE? WE HAVE FIVE GOLD COINS WITH US.
HORSES' EGGS? THESE MEN MUST BE MAD. WELL...

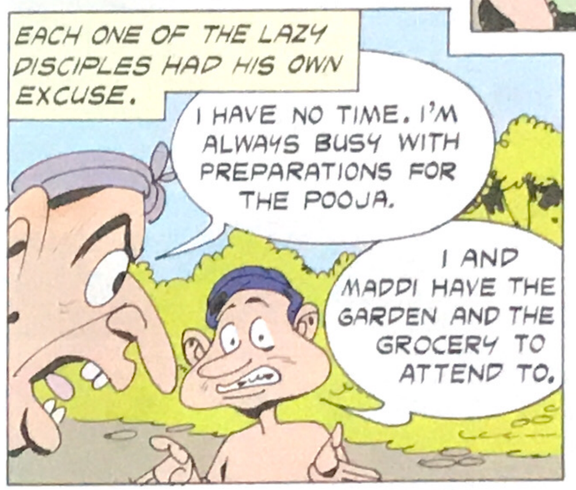
THESE EGGS ARE SPECIAL. THEY ARE NOT FOR SALE.
WON'T YOU SELL US JUST ONE? IT'S FOR OUR GURU.

FOR THE GURU, DID YOU SAY? ALL RIGHT. I SHALL LET YOU HAVE ONE.
TAKE THIS. IT'S A GOOD ONE.

THANK YOU SO MUCH.
HERE IS YOUR MONEY.

THAT WAS AN EXCELLENT BARGAIN. NOW LET US REST FOR A WHILE.

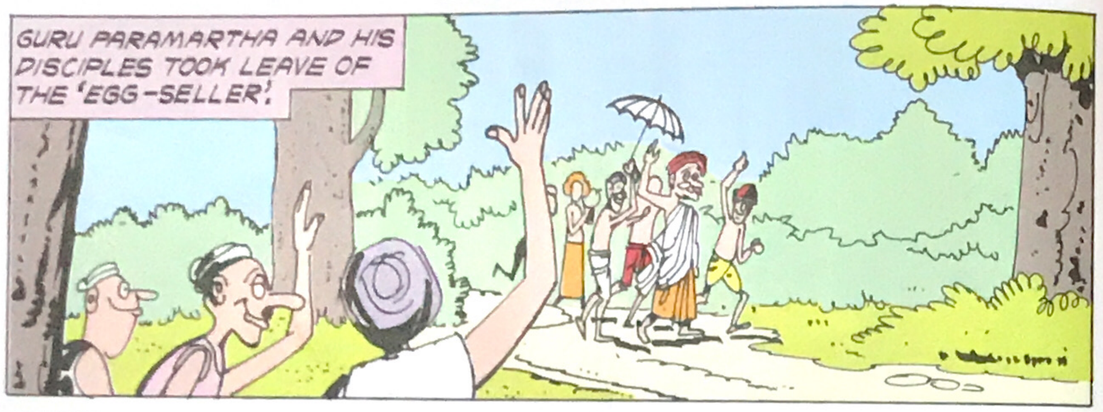

WE'VE GOT THE EGG. BUT WHO WILL HATCH IT?
ONE OF US WILL HAVE TO DO IT, OF COURSE.

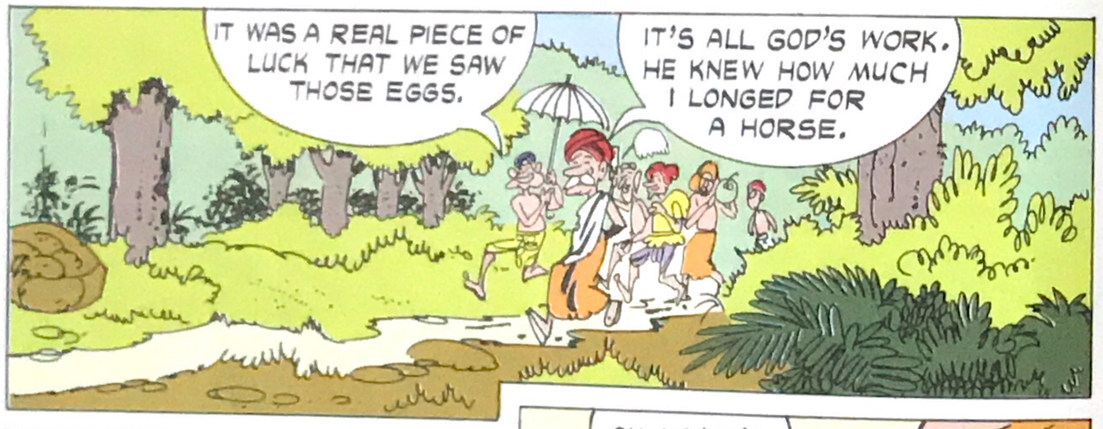

EACH ONE OF THE LAZY DISCIPLES HAD HIS OWN EXCUSE.
I HAVE NO TIME. I'M ALWAYS BUSY WITH PREPARATIONS FOR THE POOJA.
I AND MADDI HAVE THE GARDEN AND THE GROCERY TO ATTEND TO.

I AM BUSY THE WHOLE DAY COOKING FOR ALL OF US...
... AND I HAVE TO ATTEND TO THE GUESTS.

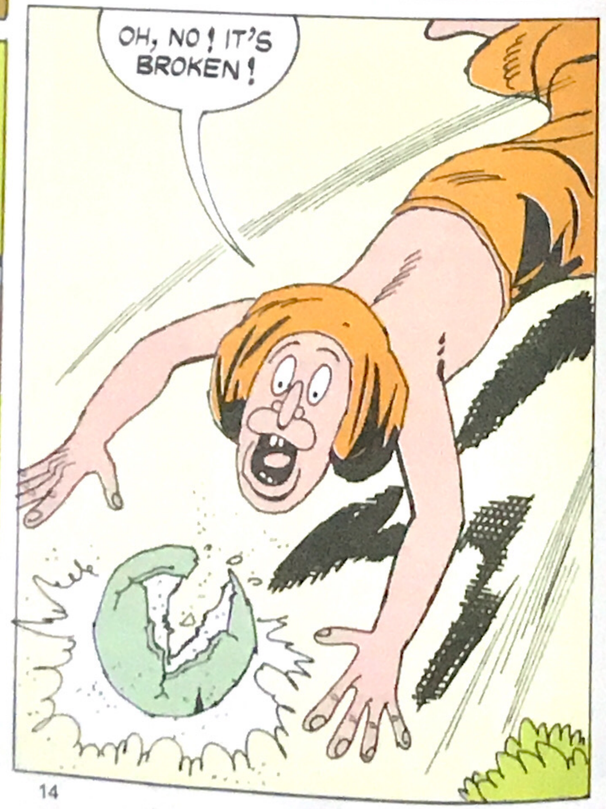
DON'T WORRY, MY BOYS. I AM ALWAYS FREE. I WILL HATCH IT.

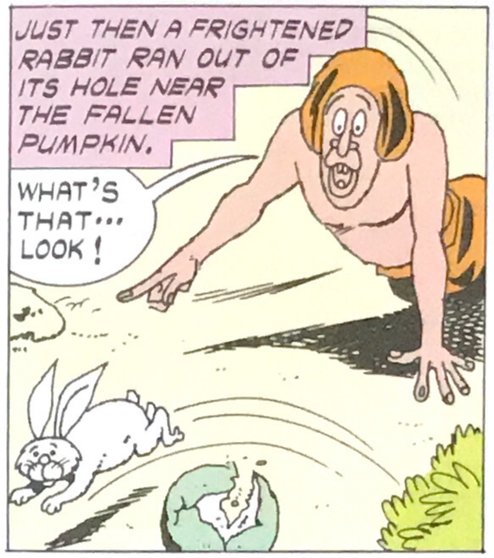
IF THE EGG IS HATCHED BY YOU, O MAHATMA, A FINE HORSE IS SURE TO COME OUT.

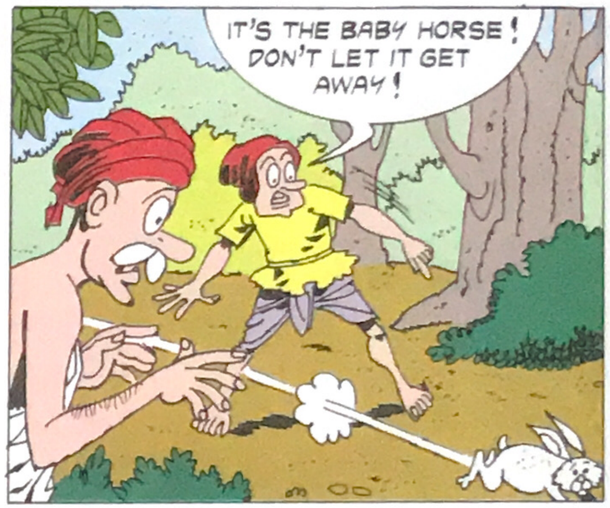

GURU PARAMARTHA AND HIS DISCIPLES TOOK LEAVE OF THE 'EGG-SELLER'.


IT WAS A REAL PIECE OF LUCK THAT WE SAW THOSE EGGS.
IT'S ALL GOD'S WORK. HE KNEW HOW MUCH I LONGED FOR A HORSE.

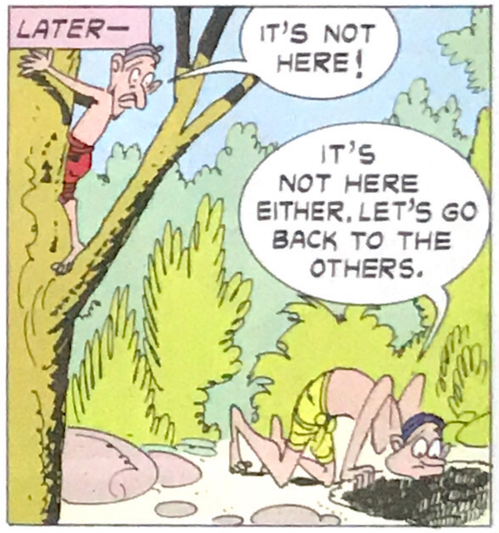
AS THEY TRUDGED ON—
OOOH! HELP! OW! THE EGG!


OH, NO! IT'S BROKEN!

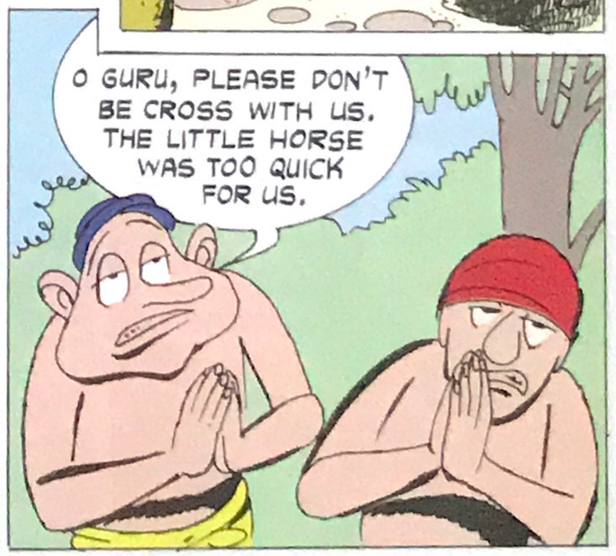

JUST THEN A FRIGHTENED RABBIT RAN OUT OF ITS HOLE NEAR THE FALLEN PUMPKIN.
WHAT'S THAT... LOOK!

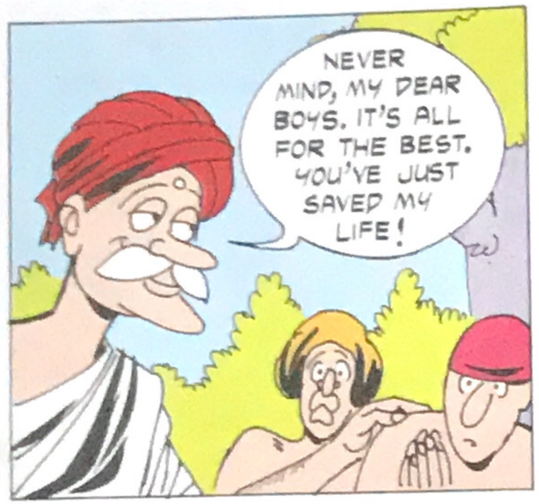

IT'S THE BABY HORSE! DON'T LET IT GET AWAY!

WHERE HAS IT GONE? WE MUST FIND IT. WE'LL GO THIS WAY. YOU GO THAT WAY. QUICK!


LATER—
IT'S NOT HERE!
IT'S NOT HERE EITHER. LET'S GO BACK TO THE OTHERS.

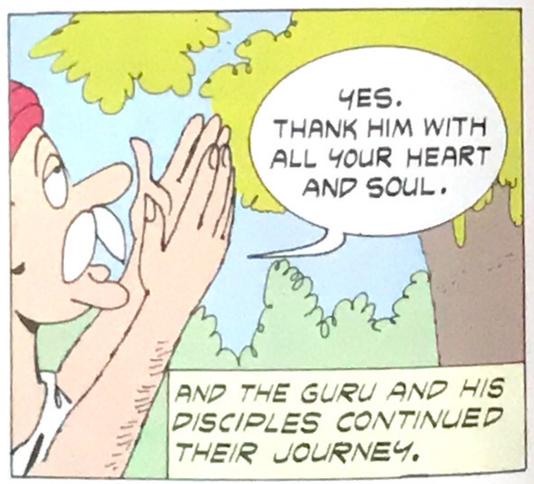
I THINK WE'VE LOST IT AFTER ALL. WHAT A SHAME!


O GURU, PLEASE DON'T BE CROSS WITH US. THE LITTLE HORSE WAS TOO QUICK FOR US.

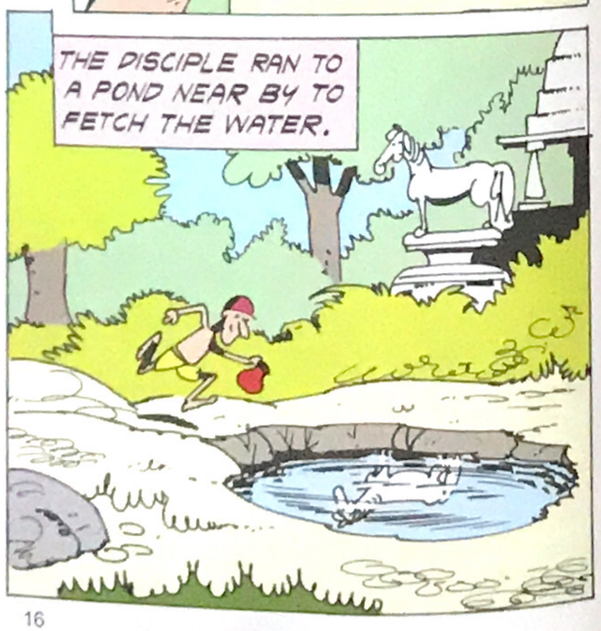

NEVER MIND, MY DEAR BOYS. IT'S ALL FOR THE BEST. YOU'VE JUST SAVED MY LIFE!

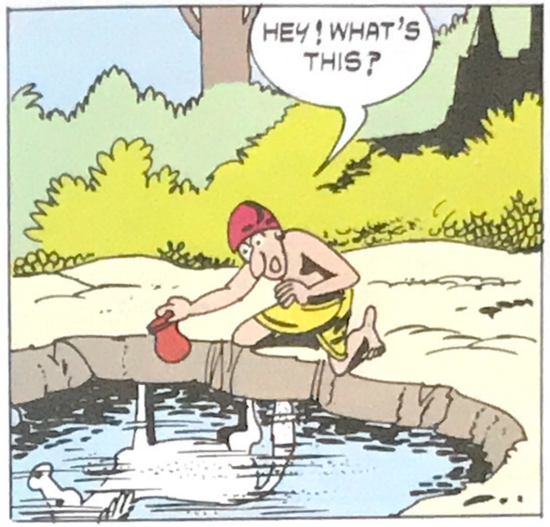
CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I HAD TO RIDE THAT HORSE?

YOU WOULD BE THROWN OFF AND GET KILLED!
OH, NO! THANK GOD, WE LOST THE HORSE!

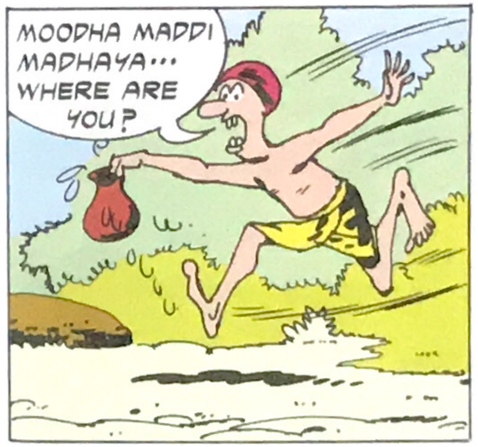

YES. THANK HIM WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND SOUL.
AND THE GURU AND HIS DISCIPLES CONTINUED THEIR JOURNEY.

AS THE DAY GREW WARMER—
PHEW! I AM DYING OF THIRST.
I'LL GET YOU SOME WATER.

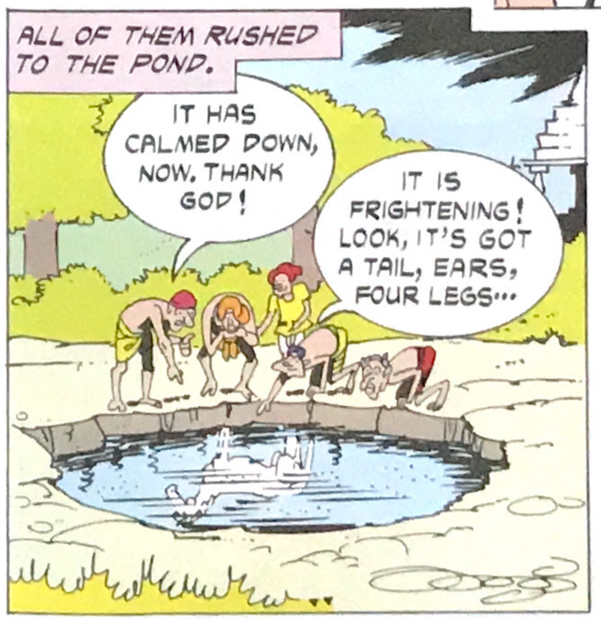

THE DISCIPLE RAN TO A POND NEAR BY TO FETCH THE WATER.


HEY! WHAT'S THIS?

IT MOVES! IT'S A WILD BEAST! IT'S SHAKING WITH ANGER! EEEAH!

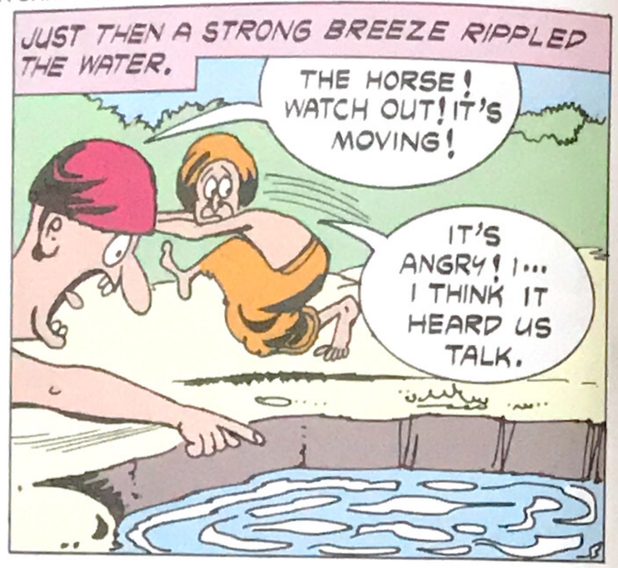

MOODHA MADDI MADHAYA... WHERE ARE YOU?

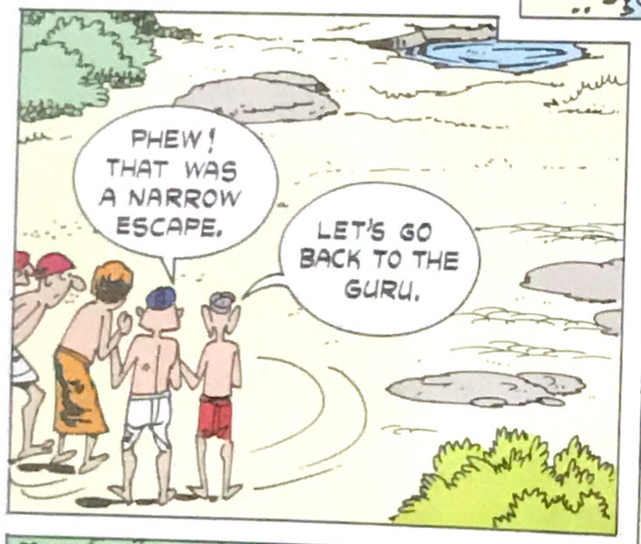
WHAT'S THE MATTER? WHAT IS IT, NOW?
AN ANGRY BEAST... THERE... IN THE POND.

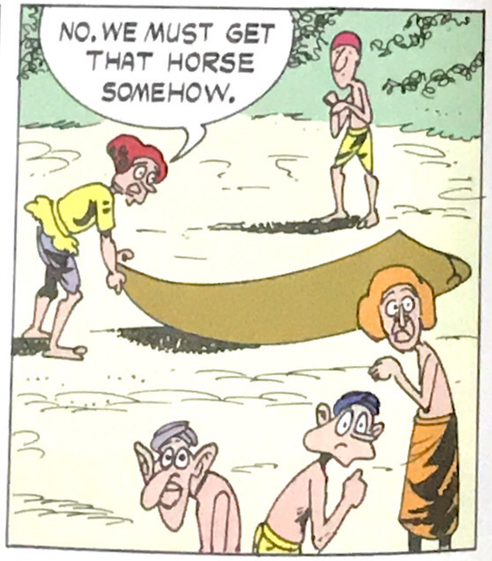

ALL OF THEM RUSHED TO THE POND.
IT HAS CALMED DOWN, NOW. THANK GOD!
IT IS FRIGHTENING! LOOK, IT'S GOT A TAIL, EARS, FOUR LEGS...

IT'S A HORSE, YOU FOOLS!
HE'S RIGHT. IT'S A HORSE!

I SAY! WHY DON'T WE TAKE THIS HORSE TO OUR GURU?


JUST THEN A STRONG BREEZE RIPPLED THE WATER.
THE HORSE! WATCH OUT! IT'S MOVING!
IT'S ANGRY! I... I THINK IT HEARD US TALK.


PHEW! THAT WAS A NARROW ESCAPE.
LET'S GO BACK TO THE GURU.

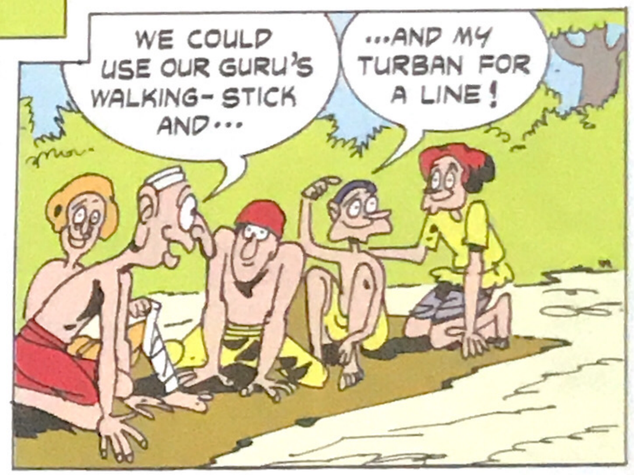

NO, WE MUST GET THAT HORSE SOMEHOW.

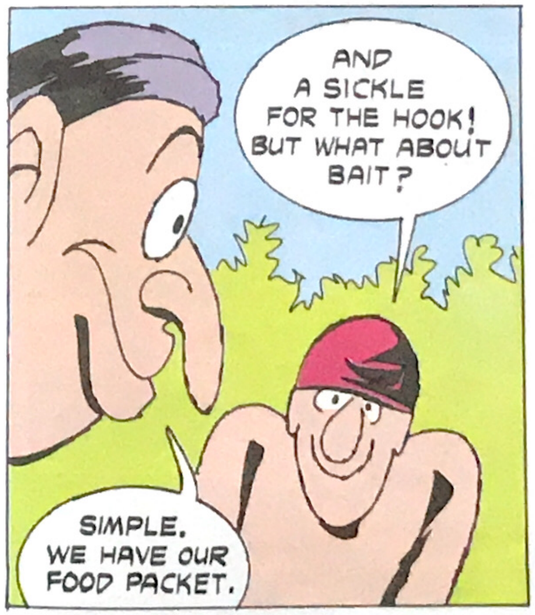
JUST GO AND SEE WHAT IT'S DOING.

IT'S ABSOLUTELY STILL NOW.
ALL THE SAME WE CAN'T JUST GO AND GRAB IT. IT WILL KNOW WHAT WE ARE UP TOO.

WE MUST THINK OF SOME OTHER PLAN TO...
I HAVE IT! LET'S CATCH IT LIKE A FISH.

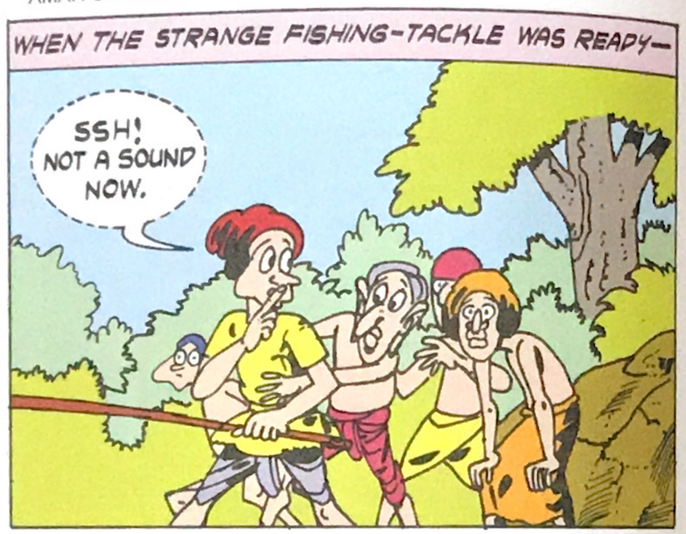
BUT WE DON'T HAVE A FISHING ROD.
WE'LL MAKE ONE.


WE COULD USE OUR GURU'S WALKING-STICK AND...
...AND MY TURBAN FOR A LINE!

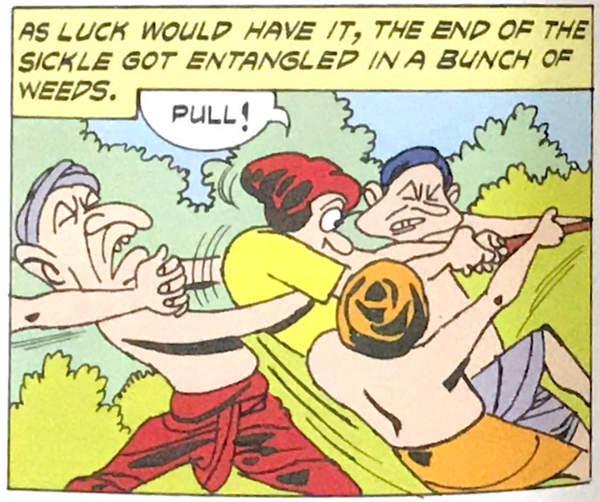

AND A SICKLE FOR THE HOOK! BUT WHAT ABOUT BAIT?
SIMPLE. WE HAVE OUR FOOD PACKET.

MY! AREN'T WE CLEVER! WHAT WILL OUR GURU SAY WHEN HE HEARS ABOUT ALL THIS!
LET'S SURPRISE HIM WITH THE HORSE AND THEN TELL HIM HOW WE CAUGHT IT.

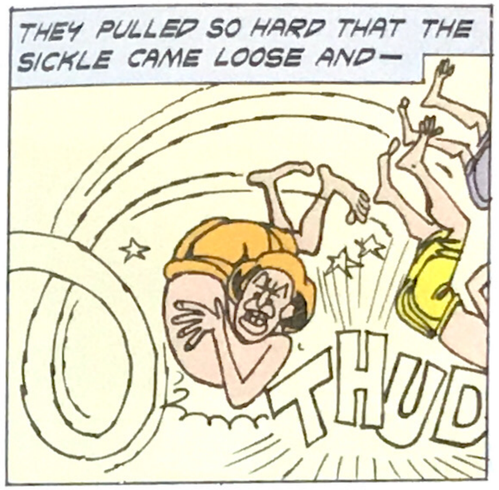
I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE HIS FACE!
NOW LET'S NOT WASTE TIME. LET'S GET TO WORK.

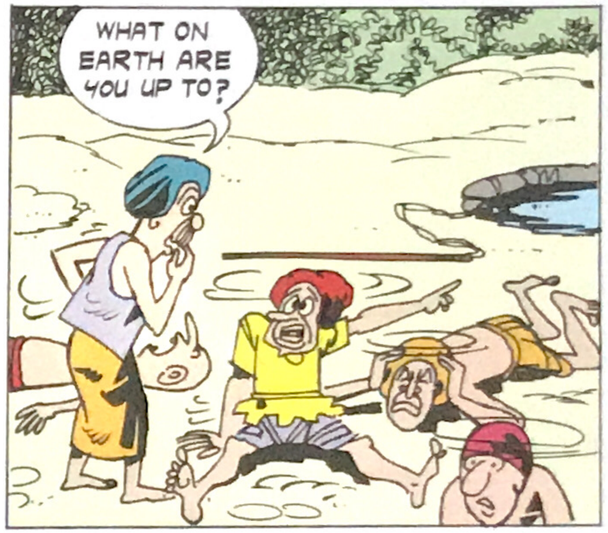

WHEN THE STRANGE FISHING-TACKLE WAS READY—
SSH! NOT A SOUND NOW.

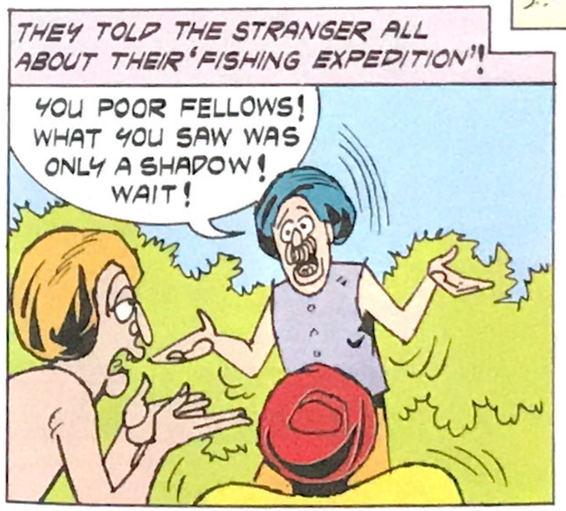
SH! I'LL SAY "PULL" WHEN THE HORSE TAKES THE BAIT. ALL OF YOU MUST THEN PULL!

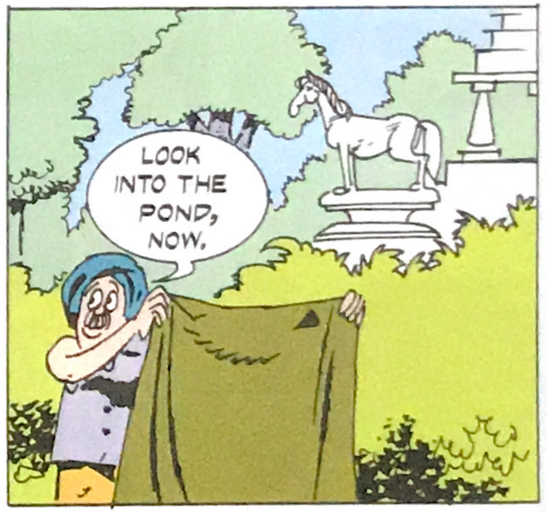

AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT, THE END OF THE SICKLE GOT ENTANGLED IN A BUNCH OF WEEDS.
PULL!

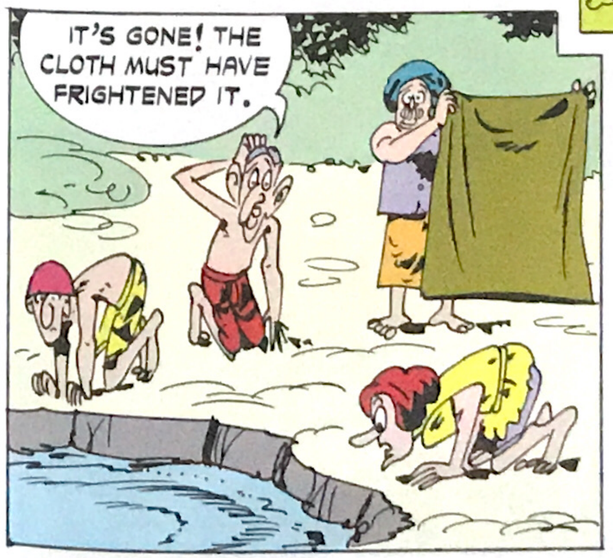
COME ON! HARDER! HARDER!

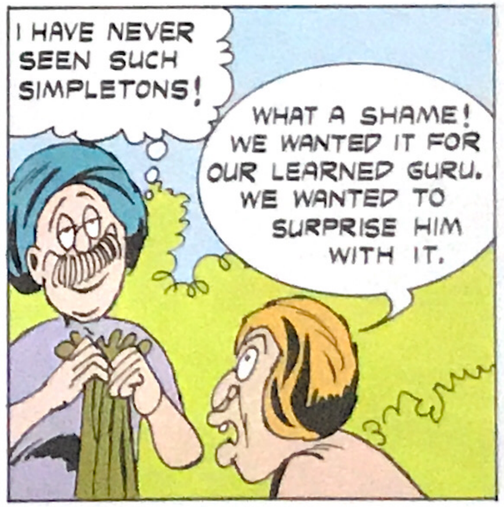

THEY PULLED SO HARD THAT THE SICKLE CAME LOOSE AND—
THUD


WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU UP TO?

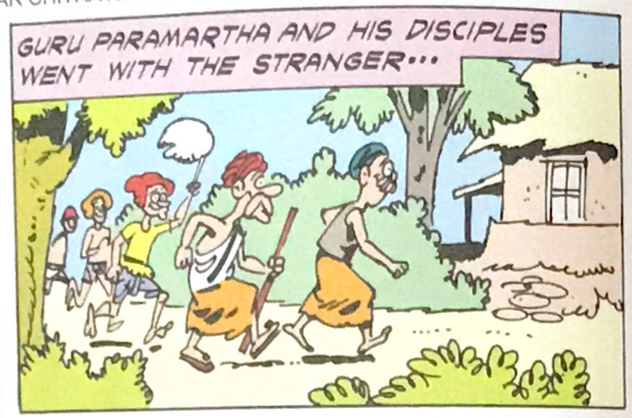

THEY TOLD THE STRANGER ALL ABOUT THEIR 'FISHING EXPEDITION'!
YOU POOR FELLOWS! WHAT YOU SAW WAS ONLY A SHADOW! WAIT!


LOOK INTO THE POND, NOW.


IT'S GONE! THE CLOTH MUST HAVE FRIGHTENED IT.

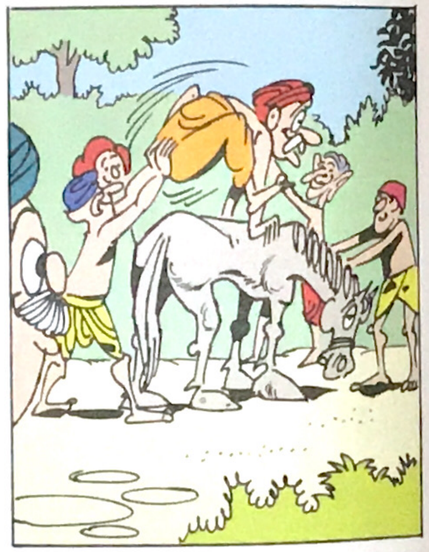

I HAVE NEVER SEEN SUCH SIMPLETONS!
WHAT A SHAME! WE WANTED IT FOR OUR LEARNED GURU. WE WANTED TO SURPRISE HIM WITH IT.

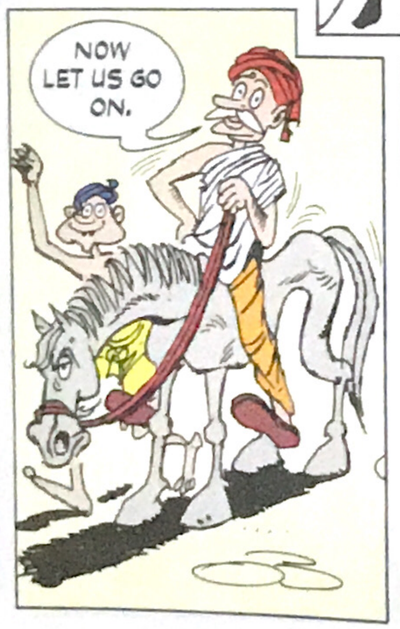
I HAVE AN OLD HORSE TO SPARE... YOU CAN COME AND TAKE IT IF YOU WANT.
OH, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, SIR. I'LL FETCH OUR GURU.


GURU PARAMARTHA AND HIS DISCIPLES WENT WITH THE STRANGER...

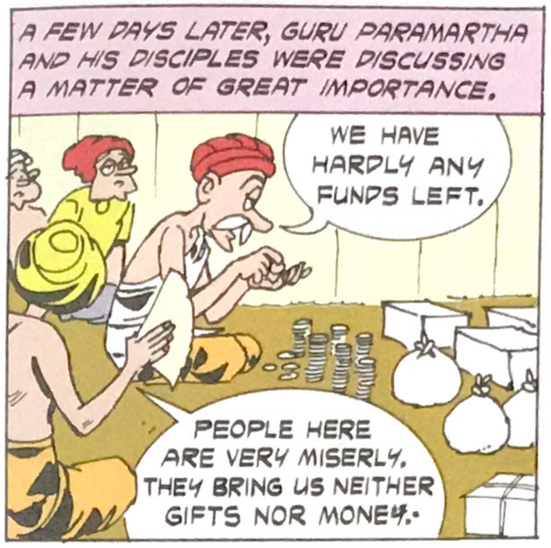
...TO HIS HOUSE.
HERE! HE'S ALL YOURS.

WHAT A FINE, NOBLE ANIMAL! WILL YOU HELP ME MOUNT HIM.

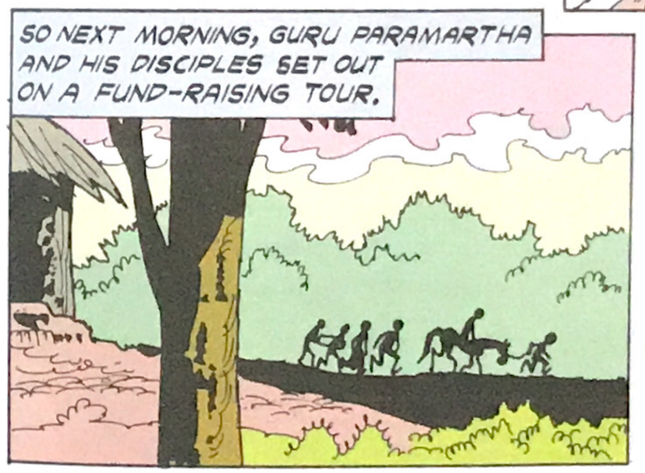


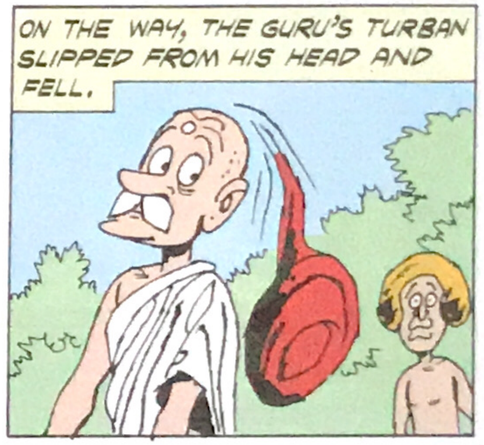

NOW LET US GO ON.

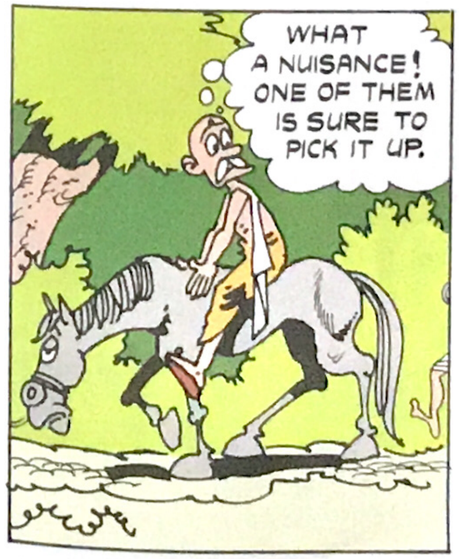
SOME TIME LATER—
THE TEMPLE! WE'VE REACHED THE TEMPLE!

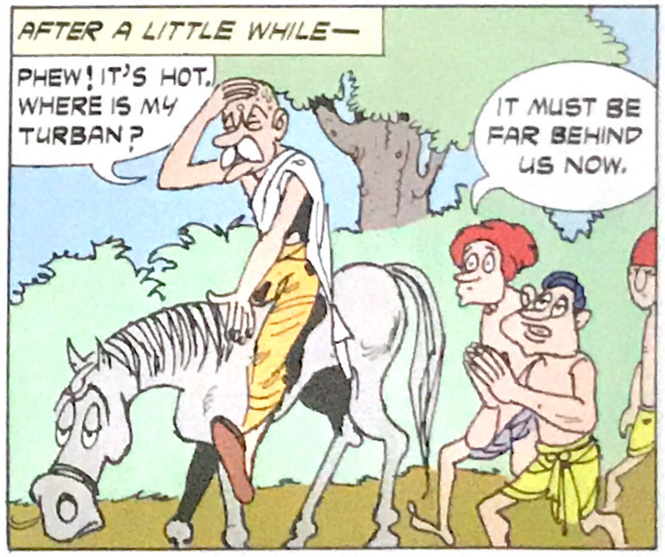

A FEW DAYS LATER, GURU PARAMARTHA AND HIS DISCIPLES WERE DISCUSSING A MATTER OF GREAT IMPORTANCE.
WE HAVE HARDLY ANY FUNDS LEFT.
PEOPLE HERE ARE VERY MISERLY. THEY BRING US NEITHER GIFTS NOR MONEY.

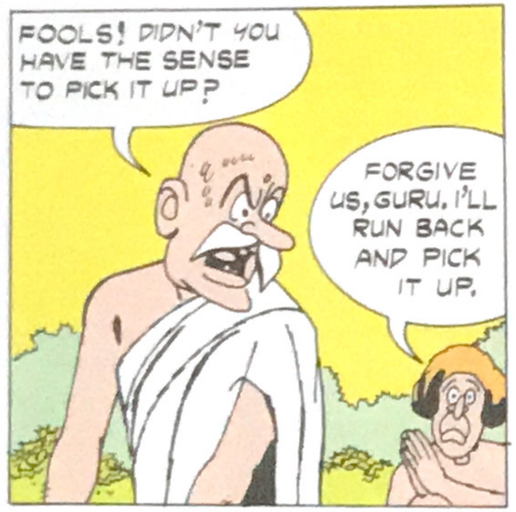
WE CAN'T SIT HERE AND WAIT FOR THEM TO COME AND DONATE GIFTS. WE MUST GO TO THEM.
AS YOU COMMAND, O GURU.

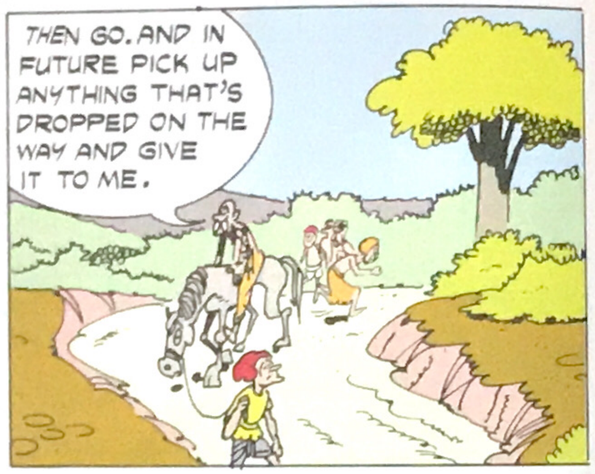

SO NEXT MORNING, GURU PARAMARTHA AND HIS DISCIPLES SET OUT ON A FUND-RAISING TOUR.

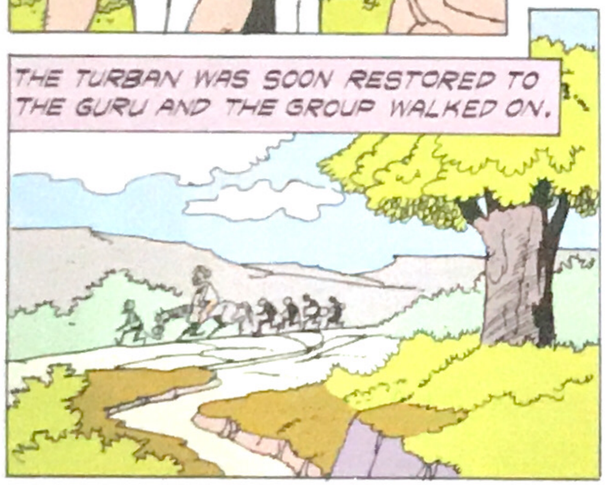

ON THE WAY, THE GURU'S TURBAN SLIPPED FROM HIS HEAD AND FELL.

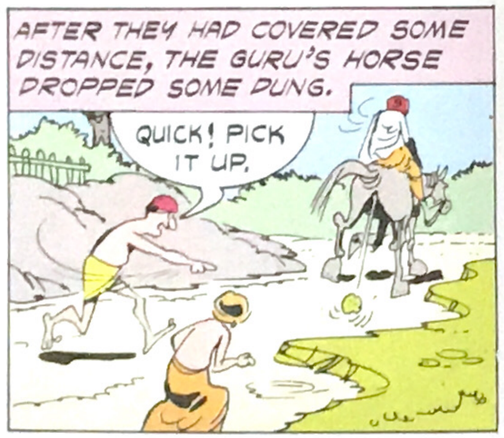

WHAT A NUISANCE! ONE OF THEM IS SURE TO PICK IT UP.


AFTER A LITTLE WHILE—
PHEW! IT'S HOT. WHERE IS MY TURBAN?
IT MUST BE FAR BEHIND US NOW.

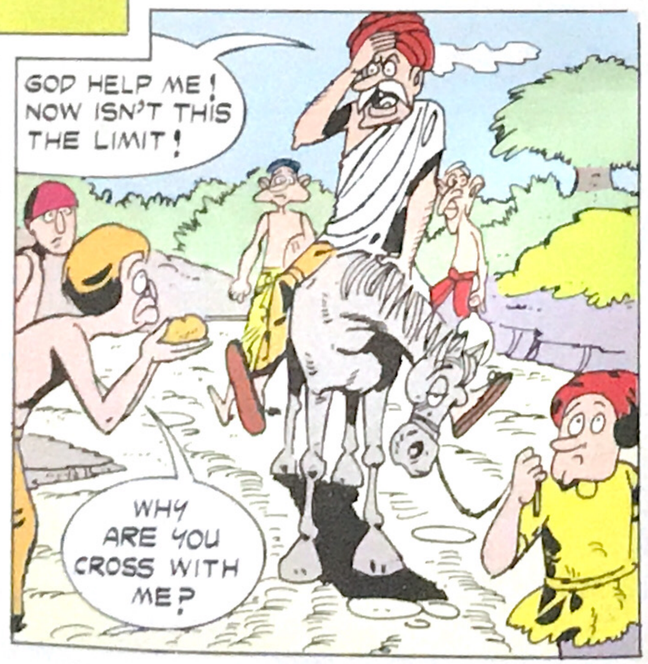

FOOLS! DIDN'T YOU HAVE THE SENSE TO PICK IT UP?
FORGIVE US, GURU. I'LL RUN BACK AND PICK IT UP.

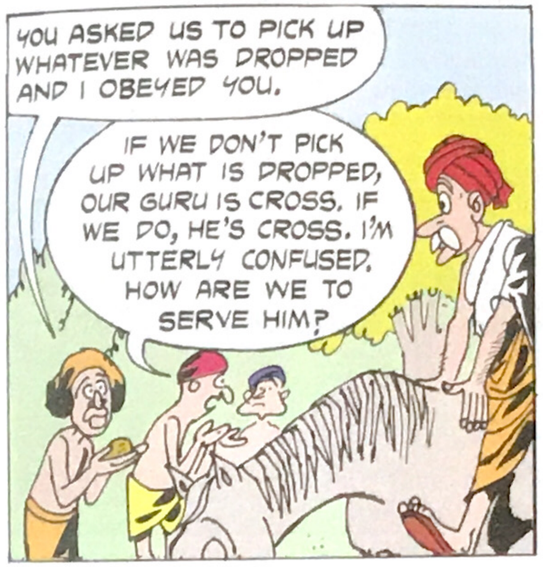

THEN GO. AND IN FUTURE PICK UP ANYTHING THAT'S DROPPED ON THE WAY AND GIVE IT TO ME.


THE TURBAN WAS SOON RESTORED TO THE GURU AND THE GROUP WALKED ON.

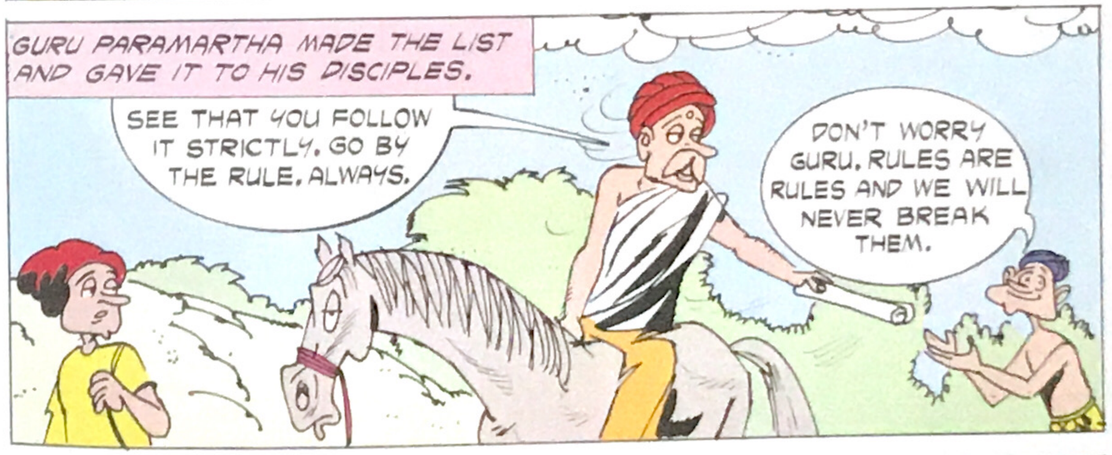

AFTER THEY HAD COVERED SOME DISTANCE, THE GURU'S HORSE DROPPED SOME DUNG.
QUICK! PICK IT UP.

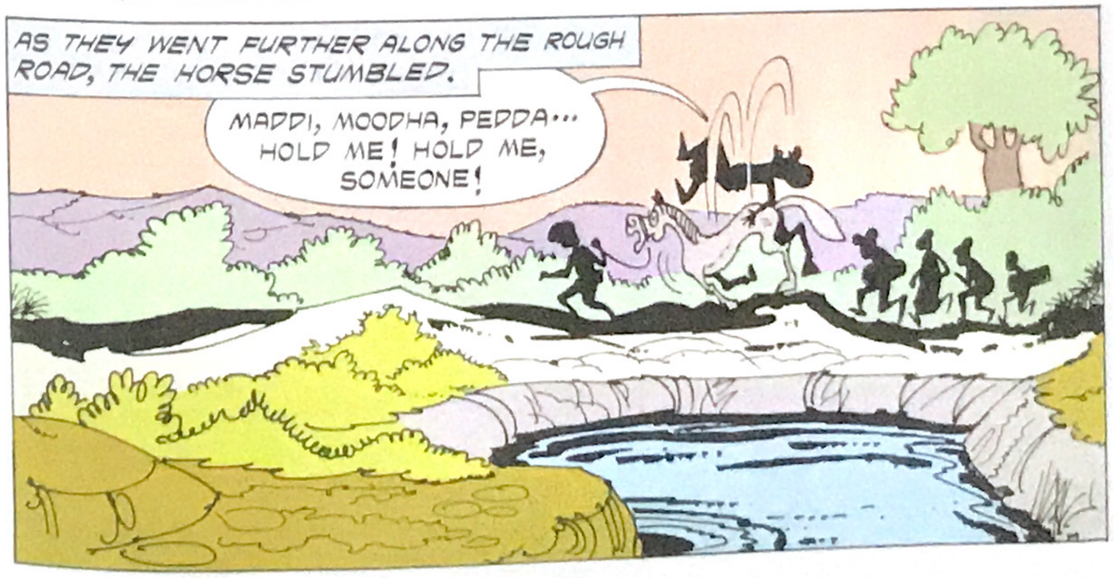
THE HORSE DROPPED THIS ON THE WAY.


GOD HELP ME! NOW ISN'T THIS THE LIMIT!
WHY ARE YOU CROSS WITH ME?

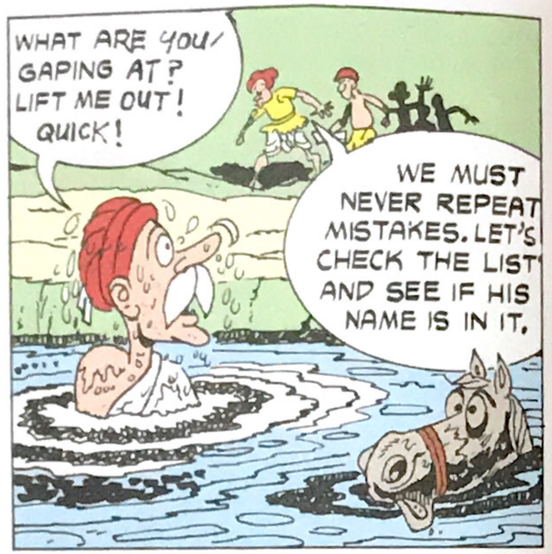

YOU ASKED US TO PICK UP WHATEVER WAS DROPPED AND I OBEYED YOU.
IF WE DON'T PICK UP WHAT IS DROPPED, OUR GURU IS CROSS. IF WE DO, HE'S CROSS. I'M UTTERLY CONFUSED. HOW ARE WE TO SERVE HIM?

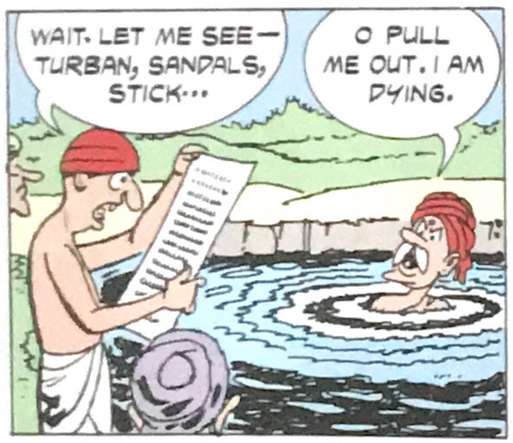
DON'T WORRY. YOU'LL LEARN BY EXPERIENCE AND I AM ALWAYS THERE TO GUIDE YOU.
PERHAPS IF YOU GIVE US A LIST OF ALL THE THINGS WHICH HAVE TO BE PICKED UP, WE COULD SERVE YOU BETTER.


GURU PARAMARTHA MADE THE LIST AND GAVE IT TO HIS DISCIPLES.
SEE THAT YOU FOLLOW IT STRICTLY. GO BY THE RULE. ALWAYS.
DON'T WORRY GURU. RULES ARE RULES AND WE WILL NEVER BREAK THEM.


AS THEY WENT FURTHER ALONG THE ROUGH ROAD, THE HORSE STUMBLED.
MADDI, MOODHA, PEDDA... HOLD ME! HOLD ME, SOMEONE!

SPLASH!!!


WHAT ARE YOU GAPING AT? LIFT ME OUT! QUICK!
WE MUST NEVER REPEAT MISTAKES. LET'S CHECK THE LIST AND SEE IF HIS NAME IS IN IT.


WAIT. LET ME SEE— TURBAN, SANDALS, STICK...
O PULL ME OUT. I AM DYING.

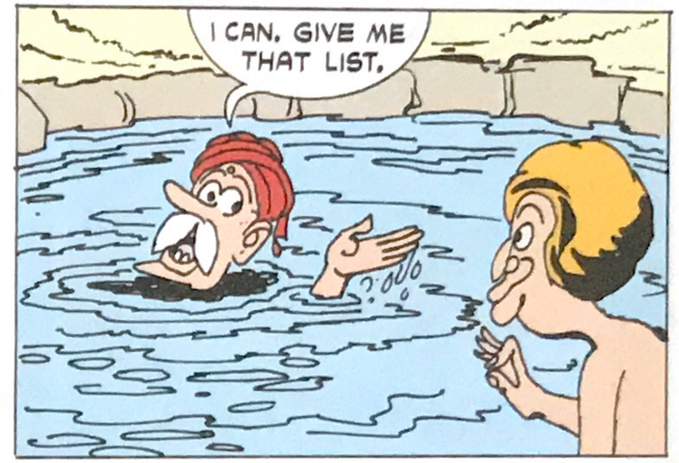
YOUR NAME IS NOT IN THE LIST, O GURU,

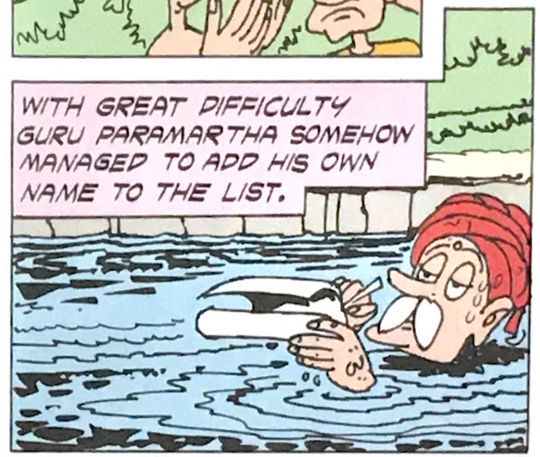
THROW AWAY THAT LIST AND HELP ME OUT.

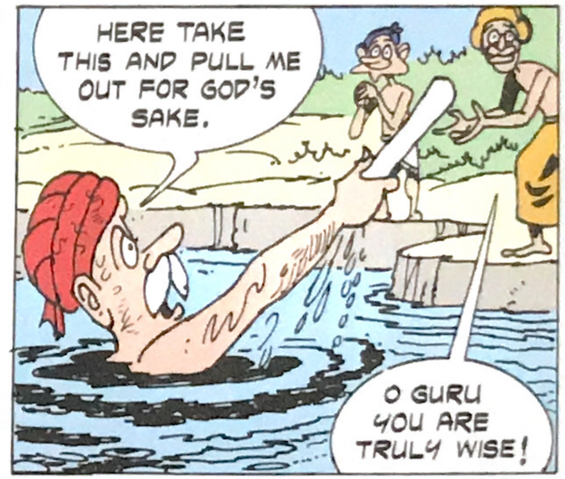
YOU CAN'T MEAN IT! WE KNOW YOU ARE ONLY TESTING US.

HAVE PITY ON ME. PULL ME OUT.
BELOVED GURU, WE ARE SORRY BUT RULES ARE RULES.

YOU, OUR GURU, HAVE SET THEM. WILL GOD EVER FORGIVE US IF WE BREAK THEM?
O WHAT IS THE WAY OUT OF THIS CRISIS? WHO CAN HELP US?

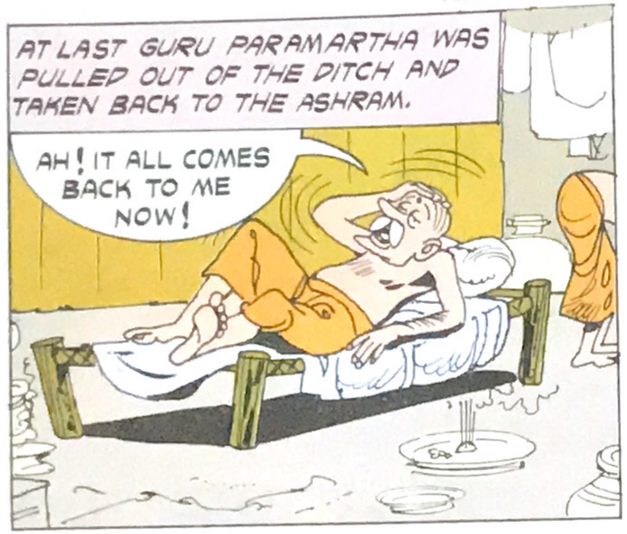

I CAN. GIVE ME THAT LIST.

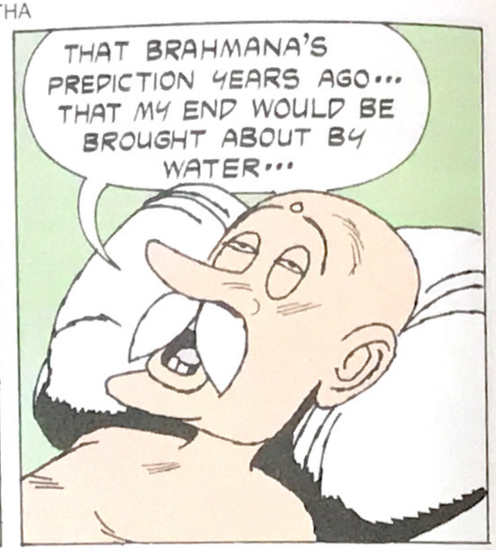

WITH GREAT DIFFICULTY GURU PARAMARTHA SOMEHOW MANAGED TO ADD HIS OWN NAME TO THE LIST.

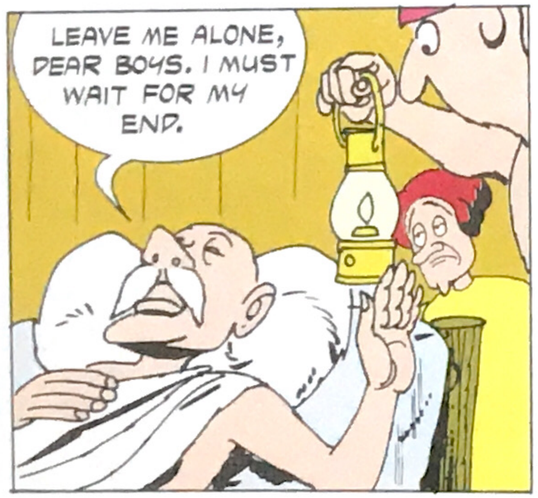

HERE TAKE THIS AND PULL ME OUT FOR GOD'S SAKE.
O GURU YOU ARE TRULY WISE!

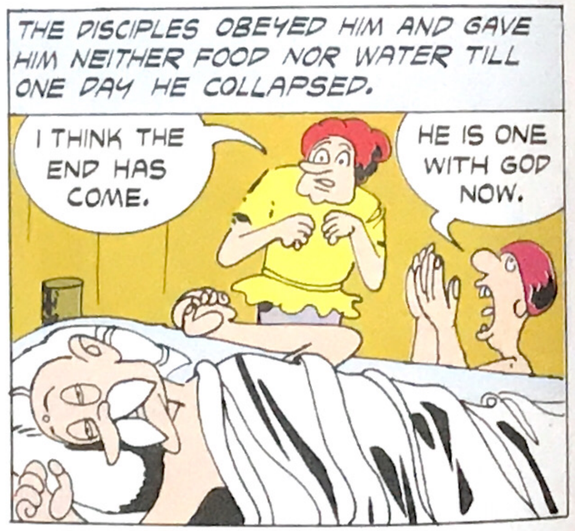
IT'S MARVELLOUS HOW HE FINDS A SOLUTION TO THE MOST DIFFICULT PROBLEMS.
NOW STOP ADMIRING ME AND PULL ME OUT.

ALWAYS AT YOUR SERVICE, O GURU.

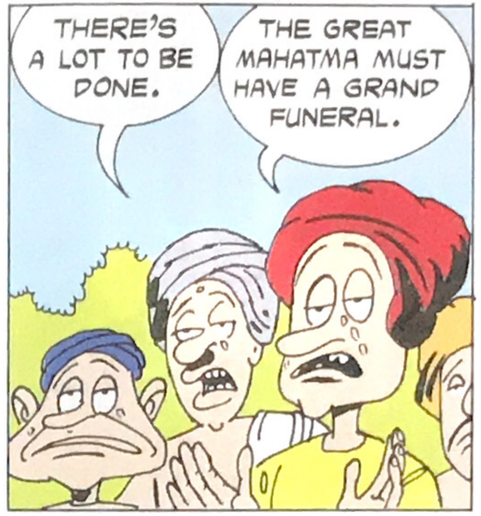

AT LAST GURU PARAMARTHA WAS PULLED OUT OF THE DITCH AND TAKEN BACK TO THE ASHRAM.
AH! IT ALL COMES BACK TO ME NOW!

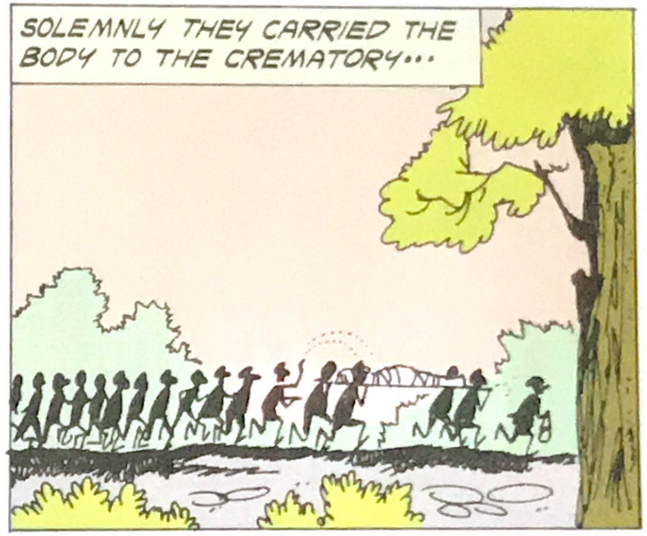

THAT BRAHMANA'S PREDICTION YEARS AGO... THAT MY END WOULD BE BROUGHT ABOUT BY WATER...

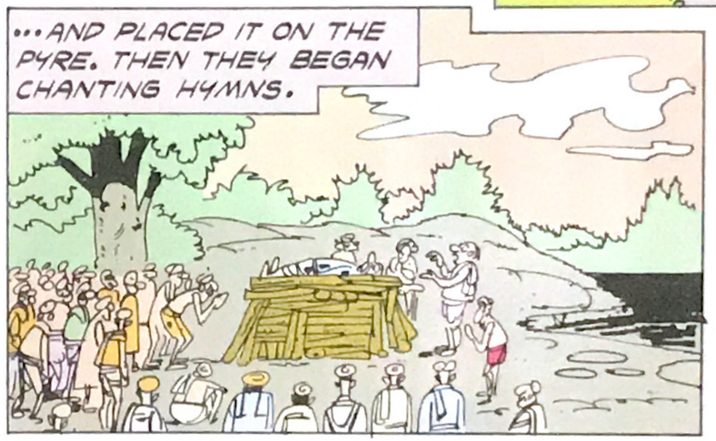

LEAVE ME ALONE, DEAR BOYS. I MUST WAIT FOR MY END.

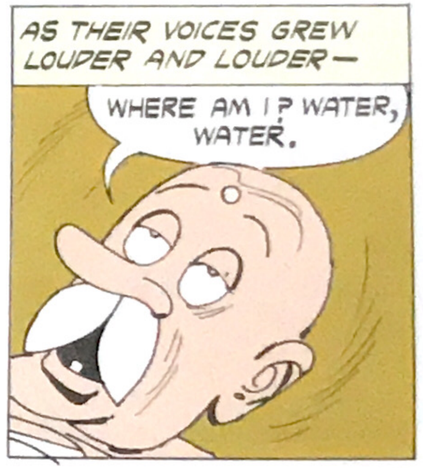

THE DISCIPLES OBEYED HIM AND GAVE HIM NEITHER FOOD NOR WATER TILL ONE DAY HE COLLAPSED.
I THINK THE END HAS COME.
HE IS ONE WITH GOD NOW.

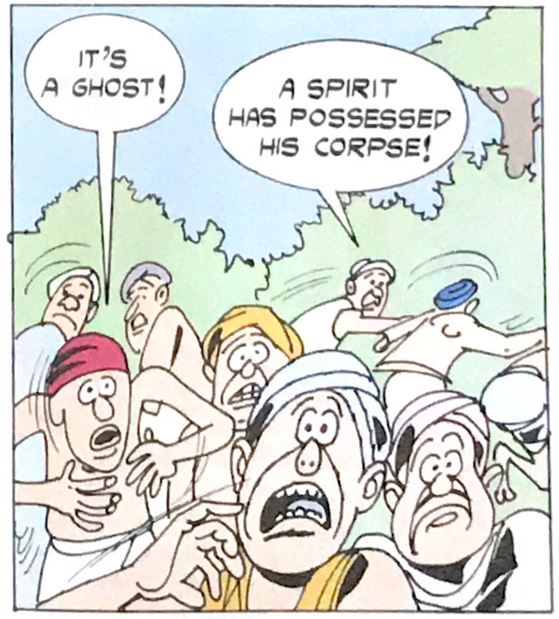
BOO-HOO-HOO! OUR GURU HAS LEFT US! WE ARE ORPHANED!
HUSH! FRIENDS! THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO CRY. ARRANGEMENTS HAVE TO BE MADE FOR THE LAST RITES.


THERE'S A LOT TO BE DONE.
THE GREAT MAHATMA MUST HAVE A GRAND FUNERAL.

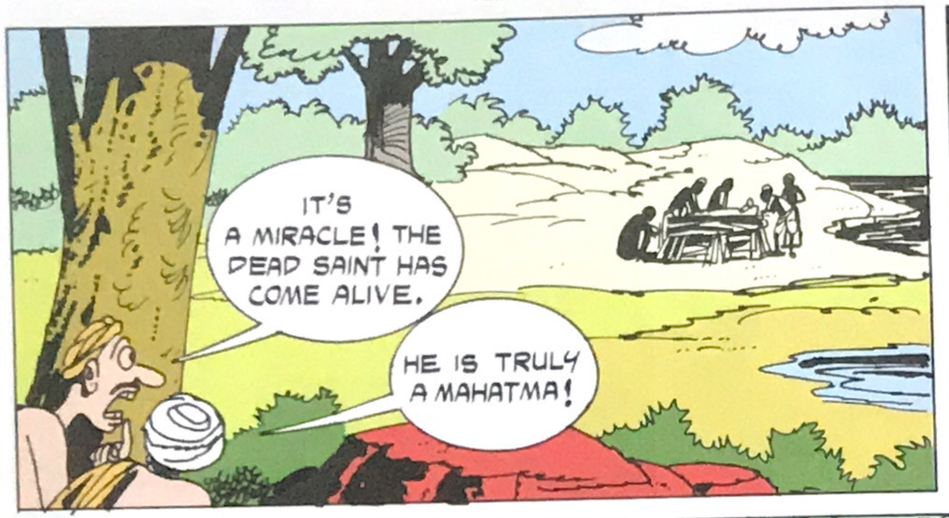

SOLEMNLY THEY CARRIED THE BODY TO THE CREMATORY...

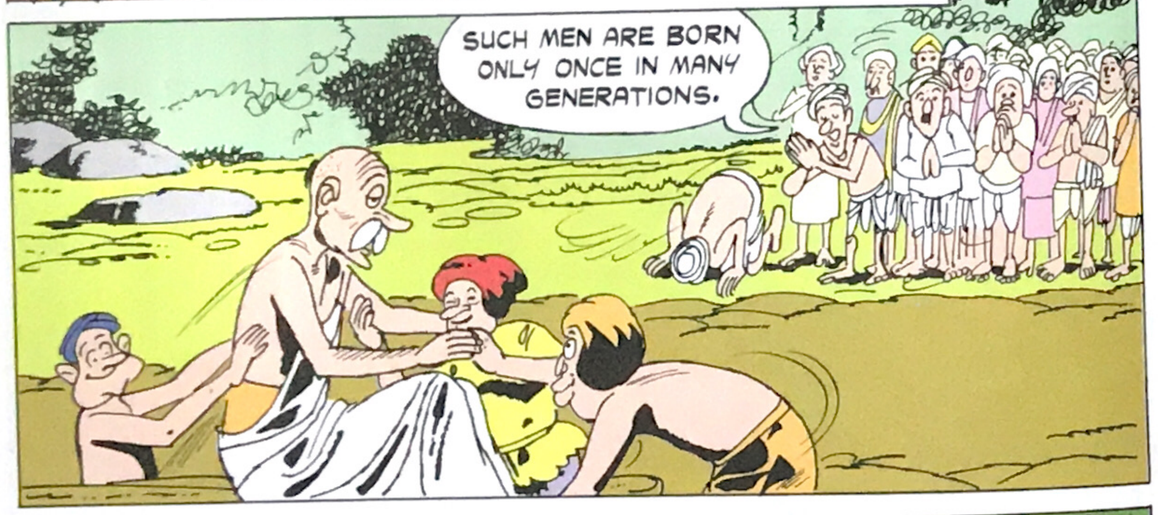

...AND PLACED IT ON THE PYRE. THEN THEY BEGAN CHANTING HYMNS.

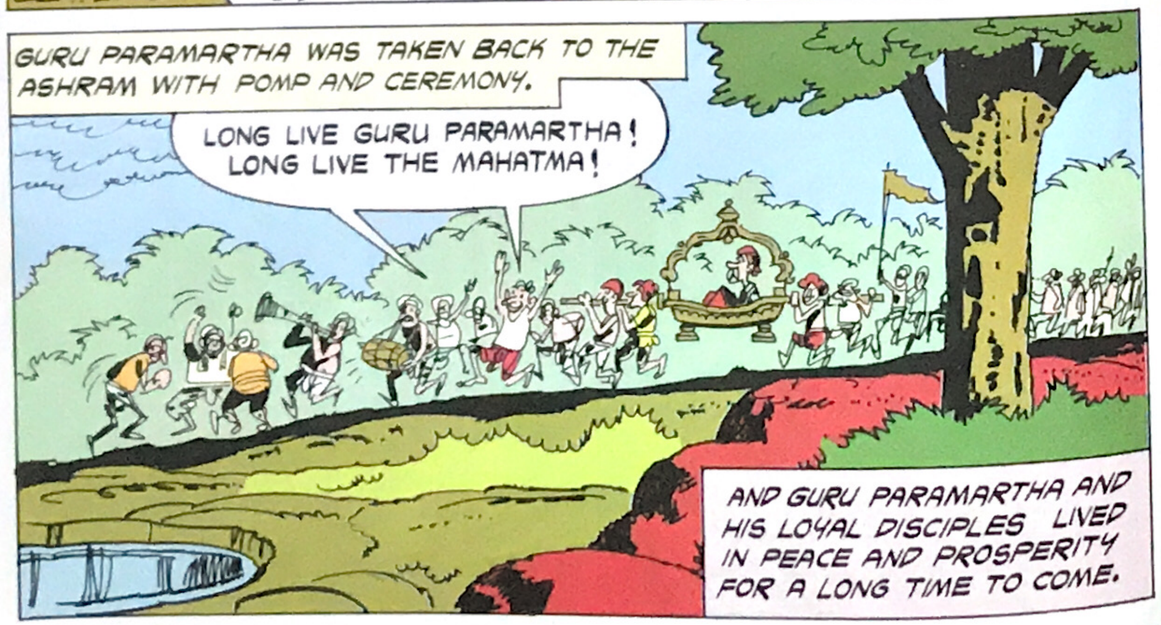

AS THEIR VOICES GREW LOUDER AND LOUDER—
WHERE AM I? WATER, WATER.


IT'S A GHOST!
A SPIRIT HAS POSSESSED HIS CORPSE!

WATER! GIVE ME WATER.
HE MOVES. HE IS NOT DEAD!
ALWAYS AT YOUR SERVICE, O GURU.

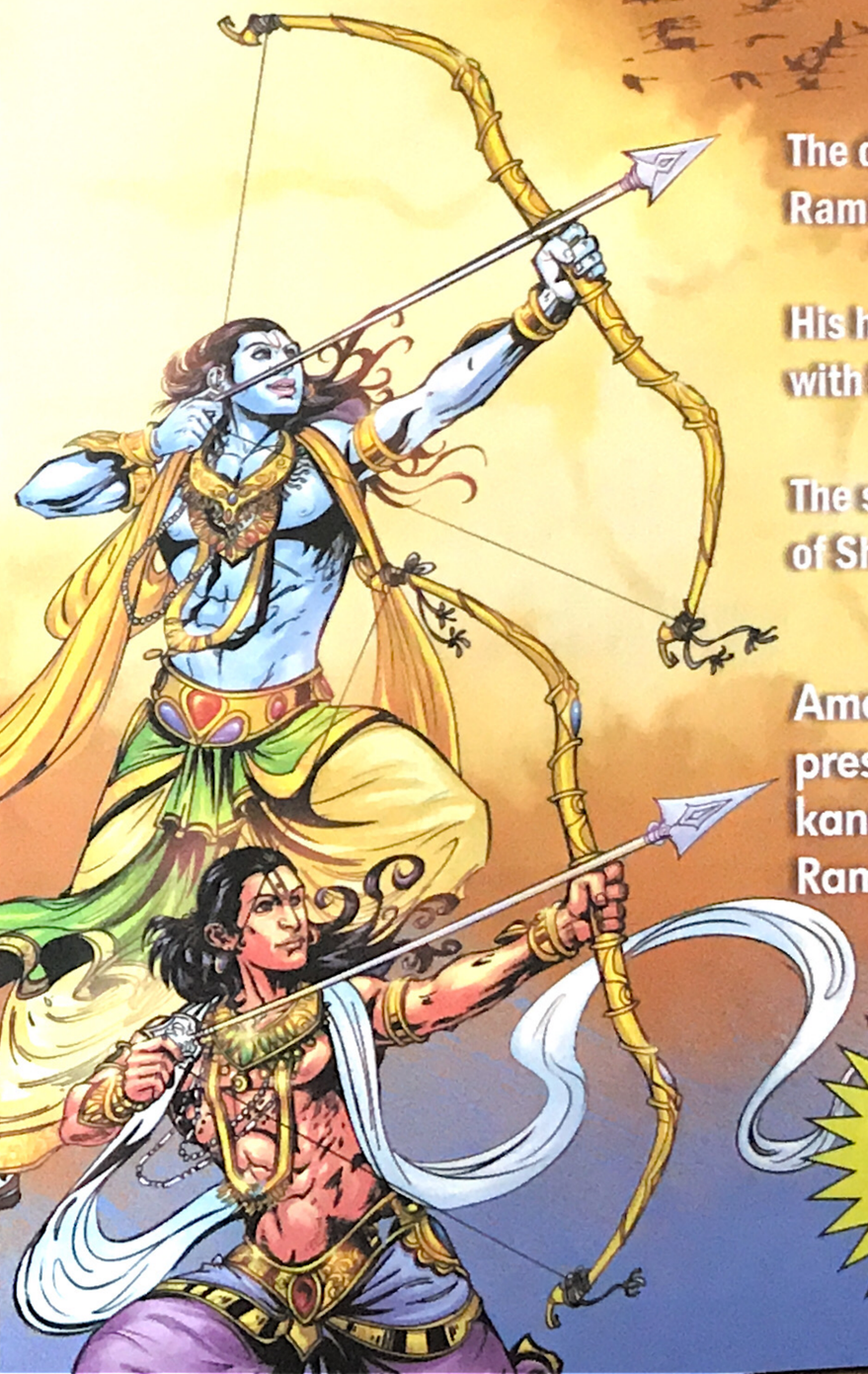






BEGINNING OF AN EPIC SAGA

BALA KAND



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